

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Hagel signals big changes ahead for Defense Department

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel signaled possible big changes ahead for his department in acquisition, personnel and organization as he delivered his first major policy speech as Pentagon chief, April 3.

Hagel outlined his plan of attack for the strategic and financial challenges the Defense Department faces during remarks at the National Defense University.

“We need to challenge all past assumptions and we need to put everything on the table,” he said.

Hagel said DoD’s task is to prepare for the future, “but not in a way that neglects, or is oblivious to, the realities of the present.”

At his direction, Hagel said,

Deputy Defense Secretary Ash Carter, working with Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is leading a review of the department’s strategic choices and management. The review is intended to identify the challenges, uncertainties, risks and opportunities connected to both strategic priorities and budget uncertainty. It’s also “about matching missions with resources — looking at ends, ways and means,” he said.

The review will consider big choices – “change that involves not just tweaking or chipping away at existing structures and practices but, where necessary, fashioning entirely new ones that are better suited to 21st-century realities and challenges,” the secretary said.

Reshaping the defense enter-

See HAGEL on 7.

Two Army National Guard sergeants step up to help Nebraska in retention battle

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger
Staff Photojournalist

With retention identified as a serious issue for the Nebraska Army National Guard, two Nebraska Soldiers have stepped up to make sure their fellow Soldiers are getting all the information possible to figure out what the Nebraska National Guard can do to make them a happy and sustainable Soldier.

According to Lt. Col. Shane Martin, Nebraska Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention Command commander, Nebraska’s mission for 2013 includes retaining

575 current Soldiers. As of mid-April the organization has retained 344 Soldiers, said Martin, of which 65 are six-month extensions.

In examining the problem of retention, trends seem to show Soldiers may not be receiving adequate information about what the Nebraska National Guard has to offer them. Martin said he knew that having a few extra helping hands would help Soldiers across the state with any retention question or issue they might have.

Among those volunteering to deliver this critical information are Staff Sgt. Anita Hays and Sgt. Patrick Wyrick.

See RETENTION on 12.

Retaining Nebraska’s Fighting Force
Second of a Multi-part Series

Governor congratulates Air Guard units, Guardsmen for earning national awards

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Gov. Dave Heineman helped the Nebraska National Guard celebrate several major national awards, March 11, when he used his weekly media conference to announce the accomplishments.

Standing before assembled reporters and Nebraska Guardsmen on the main floor of the Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, Heineman placed streamers representing recent U.S. Air Force organizational awards onto the Joint Force Headquarters’ Air Staff and 155th Air Refueling Wing’s colors and then shook the hands of 10 Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen who had recently won national awards in their respective fields.

See AWARD ANNOUNCEMENTS on 18.



Due Rewards: Gov. Dave Heineman places a streamer onto the guidon of the 155th Air Refueling Wing for its 11th Outstanding Unit Award during Heineman’s press conference at the Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, Neb., March 11.

Nebraska units welcomed home



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Sunny Kiss: Chief Warrant Officer 2 Brandon Hill gives his 2-year-old daughter, Ruby, a kiss at the Nebraska National Guard Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 in Lincoln, Neb. Hill and members of the 43rd Operational Support Airlift Detachment were involved in a number of aviation-related missions during their nearly nine-month deployment to Afghanistan, which ended on March 14.

Agribusiness team, aviation detachment return home from Afghanistan on same day

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger
Staff Photojournalist

Family members and friends of Soldiers with the Nebraska National Guard’s Agribusiness Development Team No. 3 and the 43rd Operational Support Airlift Detachment came together, March 14, at the Joint Force Headquarters building on

the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., with anticipation of seeing their loved ones return to Nebraska soil following deployments to Afghanistan.

The Nebraska National Guard ADT No. 3 deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and was involved in helping Afghan agricultural officials and local farmers redevelop agricultural

skills and infrastructures during their nearly yearlong deployment.

Members of the 43rd OSA Det. also deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, serving in a number of aviation-related missions during their nearly nine-month deployment.

See HOMECOMING on 6.

Small Army Guard unit that made big history stands down

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

When it comes to sheer size, the 41st Rear Operations Center was never going to turn many heads, with just a few dozen assigned at its high point.

However, when measuring its historic impact, the unit – which was designed to provide significant rear area operations support to active duty Army units engaged in war and stabilization efforts – the 41st ROC more than held

its own. In fact, as the organization fades into history, the role it played during mobilizations to Macedonia and Iraq will never be forgotten.

“The unit epitomizes the role of the National Guard in the Total Force,” said Lt. Col. Robert Kadavy, the last commander of the Nebraska’s 41st ROC, which cased its colors during a ceremony held April 6 at the South Omaha Readiness Center.

According to Kadavy, the unit, which stood up Sept. 9, 1995, after

See ROC on 16.

Inside

Army National Guardsmen prepare for wildfire season

See story and photos on 3.



Nebraska Soldiers compete to crown state’s top warriors

See story and photos on 8-11



Index

■ News Briefs	2
■ Family News	20
■ We Salute	21
■ Editorials	22
■ Sports	23

NEWS DIGEST

■Hagel commemorates Vietnam Veterans Day

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, who served in Vietnam as an Army noncommissioned officer, issued a statement commemorating Vietnam Veterans Day, March 29.

The secretary’s statement reads as follows: “Today and this weekend, communities across the country commemorate Vietnam Veterans Day.

“This year we also mark 40 years since the end of U.S. combat operations in Vietnam. On March 29, 1973, the last of our combat forces departed the country and the final release of American prisoners of war drew to a close.

“When Vietnam veterans reached their hometowns, many were not greeted with the appreciation and respect they very much deserved. In our time we must take every opportunity to thank all veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice.

“More than 1,600 service members remain unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. Their families still seek answers. Today, the Department of Defense reaffirms its commitment to take all steps to account for our missing personnel and bring closure to their families. And we salute and thank our Vietnam veterans and their families.”

■Hagel announces fewer furlough days for civilians

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – The Defense Department has revised from 22 to 14 the number of days hundreds of thousands of civilian employees could be furloughed this year because of the budget sequester, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced March 28.

In addition, a senior Defense Department official speaking on background told reporters the start of the furloughs will be delayed until mid-to-late June, after more than 700,000 department employees receive furlough notices now set to go out in early May.

Furloughs would happen over seven two-week pay periods until the end of September, when the current fiscal year ends, the senior official said. Employees would likely be told not to come to work for two days during each of those pay periods.

Department officials say they are still working to determine which employees might be exempted.

Hagel characterized the reduced furloughs as well as a revised estimate of sequestration’s impact on the defense budget as good news. The changes follow Congressional approval of a defense appropriations bill that prevented an additional \$6 billion in cuts, ordered under sequestration, from taking effect.

“It reduces a shortfall at least in the operations budget,” the secretary told reporters at a Pentagon news conference. “We came out better than we went in under the sequester, where it looks like our number is \$41 billion (in cuts) now versus the \$46 billion.”

But despite a Congressional reprieve, Hagel said the Pentagon is still going to be

short at least \$22 billion for operations and maintenance, “and that means we are going to have to prioritize and make some cuts and do what we’ve got to do,” including making sharp reductions in base operating support and training for nondeployed units.

More critical in the long run, he said, is how budget cuts will affect readiness and the department’s overall mission.

Because of that concern, he said he has directed Deputy Defense Secretary Ash Carter and Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to conduct an intensive department-wide review of U.S. strategic interests including how to protect the nation with fewer resources.

“How do we prioritize the threats and then the capabilities required to deal with threats?” he said. “There will be some significant changes, there’s no way around it.”

Dempsey said the department has already exhausted 80 percent of its operating funds halfway through the fiscal year and characterized the current budget situation as “not the deepest, but the steepest decline in our budget ever,” and warned it will affect military readiness into the future.

“We will have to trade at some level and to some degree our future readiness for current operations,” the chairman said. He called on elected leaders to give the Pentagon the budget flexibility it needs to carry out institutional reforms.

■Kerry reaffirms commitment to partnership with Afghanistan

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – The United States is committed to an enduring partnership with Afghanistan, Secretary of State John F. Kerry said March 25 in the Afghan capital of Kabul.

The United States will remain a firm partner with the emerging democracy long after the December 2014 end of the International Security Assistance Force mission, Kerry said during a news conference with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. It was Kerry’s first visit to Afghanistan as Secretary of State.

“We mean it when we say that as Afghans stand up and take control of their country’s future, they will not stand alone,” Kerry said. “America will stand with them.”

Afghanistan is transitioning in three areas — security, governance and economic — and the United States will aid the country as it moves forward, Kerry said. The United States also will aid Afghanistan as the government reaches out to Taliban members seeking reconciliation, he added. “Reconciliation is the best way to try to provide the surest end to violence and to secure a unified and a sovereign Afghanistan,” he said.

Karzai has committed to traveling to Doha, Qatar, to meet Taliban representatives. “We continue to join with President Karzai in calling on the Taliban to join a political process, to renounce the violence,” Kerry said.

U.S., NATO and partner nations have been working to train Afghan security forces and that effort is paying off, the secretary said. “The Afghan people ought to be proud that their security and their police force grow

be furloughed.

“I don’t want to be collecting my whole paycheck while other people (can’t),” the deputy defense secretary added.

The sequester cuts that took effect in March will cost the department \$46 billion through the end of the fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, officials have said.

Carter noted the continuing resolution Congress passed in March to fund that period gives DoD some flexibility in operations and maintenance spending. The “O and M” account, as it’s commonly known, contains funding for civilian pay as well as for training, operations at military installations and family and troop programs.

After Congress acted in March, Hagel announced the department would cut the planned number of furlough days from 22 to 14.

Defense leaders are submitting a “massive reprogramming” request to Congress in response to “the idiocy of sequester,” Carter said. According to the DoD comptroller’s office,

reprogramming can involve moving funds from one appropriation to another or within an appropriation, and cannot be performed without statutory authority.

Carter added he hopes Congress will “give us some additional (budget) relief of some kind” over the summer.

The deputy secretary said department leaders are focused on managing a depleted fiscal year 2013 budget as skillfully as they can.

“Of course, it’s not just to alleviate the furlough... We have other things that are important — all these things are important,” he said. “We have to make sure our nuclear deterrent forces are at full readiness. We have to support (troops in Afghanistan). We have to take care of wounded warriors.”

Defense leaders are looking to balance spending and “enlarge that pot,” Carter said. He added he hopes the department can further reduce civilian furloughs. “It’s a terrible way to treat people who are dedicated to the nation.”



Photo by Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen

‘Super Guppy’ visits 155th Air Refueling Wing

The Nebraska Air National Guard’s 155th Air Refueling Wing hosted an interesting visitor in Lincoln, Neb., March 25, when the crew of NASA’s ‘Super Guppy’ landed the aircraft at the 155th ARW on their way to Boston. The Super Guppy crew used the 155th ARW facilities to refuel the aircraft and give the crew a break.

The 155th ARW provides a perfect landing site for the Super Guppy because of long runways, low altitudes and a runway surface

great for the unique aircraft, said David Elliott, Super Guppy program manager and flight engineer.

The Super Guppy was carrying a heat shield that will be used in NASA’s next generation of spacecraft called the ‘Orion,’ which is scheduled for its first test flight next year. Orion is designed to carry astronauts beyond the orbit of the earth, the farthest into space since the Apollo lunar mission ended in 1972.

stronger and grow more capable by the day,” he said.

Security gains must translate to political and economic areas, Kerry said, and Afghanistan will go far if the elections next year are free and fair.

“We welcome the Afghan commitment, which is a reflection of the Afghan people’s desire to conduct a credible, safe, secure, all-inclusive, and transparent, and accountable election,” he said. “It’s our hope that this election is going to be a unifying moment for Afghanistan, and that it will represent, in a sense, the crowning achievement of the president’s vision for Afghanistan when he peacefully transfers power to a newly elected president.”

■General warns of potential crime, terrorism nexus

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – A potential connection between crime syndicates and terrorists in Latin America would constitute a clear danger to the region, U.S. Southern Command’s senior leader told reporters at the Pentagon, March 20.

Marine Corps Gen. John F. Kelly said the increase in Iranian influence in Latin America is worrisome and an example of the peril that the combination of criminal networks and states that sponsor terrorism, like Iran, could pose. Kelly, who took over U.S. Southern Command in November, told reporters at a Pentagon news conference that in the past six years Iran has tried to increase its influence in Central and South America. The Iranian government, he said, has built embassies and cultural centers in the region.

“The concern is that... they’re looking... for influence — say for votes in the U.N. on sanctions,” he said. “But also, and I’ve... made mention to some of our friends in the region that these guys are very, very good at what they do, and very, very skilled at what they do, and that people should just be careful as to who they’re dealing with.”

Prairie Soldier

2433 NW 24th St, Lincoln, Nebraska 68524-1801
DSN 279-8390, phone (402) 309-8390

The **Prairie Soldier** is the newspaper of the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard, authorized and published by the State Public Affairs Office, Military Department of Nebraska, in accordance with AR 360-1 and AFI 35-101.

Deadline for all submissions is the first Wednesday of the month: February, April, June, August, October, and December.

Letters, articles, notices of events, photographs and art are welcome, but may be edited for clarity or brevity. Publication of any submission is at the discretion of the editor. Submissions can also be emailed to kevin.j.hynes@mail.mil. All photos must be high resolution and include complete caption information.

The views and opinions expressed in this newspaper are those of the writers and are not necessarily those of the Military Department of Nebraska or the U.S. Department of Defense.

The **Prairie Soldier** can be read on-line at www.ne.ng.mil

Commander-in-Chief
Adjutant General
State Public Affairs Officer/Editor
Assistant Editor
Staff Photojournalist

Gov. Dave Heineman
Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons
Maj. Kevin Hynes
2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Sgt. Heidi Krueger

STAFF WRITERS Nebraska Army National Guard

Capt. Andrew Nelson
Spec. Riley Huskey
Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen
Sgt. Jason Drager

Nebraska Air National Guard

Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Senior Airman Mary Thach

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHERS Nebraska Air National Guard

Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen
Master Sgt. Vern Moore
Staff Sgt. James Lieth



Ready For Action: Staff Sgt. Trevor Dredla, a member of the 41st Rear Operations Center, prepares to practice stamping out a grass fire during the hands-on portion of a four-day wildland firefighting class conducted March 11-14 at Camp Ashland, Neb. The course was designed to prepare Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers to protect Guard assets in the event of a wildfire outbreak.



Illuminating Training: Spc. Dustin Barry, Detachment 1, Training Site Command, and another Soldier practice creating a fireline with a pair of flares, March 14. The fireline is designed to take away the fuel that a wildland fire needs to continue burning out of control.

With possible busy fire season approaching, Guard Soldiers train to be...

Ready for what may come

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

After a year that will be long remembered for a historic drought and an equally historic number of wildfires that erupted over significant portions of the state, the Nebraska National Guard took steps to prepare itself for what many experts are predicting will be an equally challenging year.

For four days in early March, 49 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers from across Nebraska descended upon Camp Ashland to earn their wildland firefighting credentials.

According to Larry Vrtiska, Nebraska National Guard environmental program manager, the March 11-14 training was designed to give the Soldiers tools they need to protect the state's federal training areas and facilities from the devastating effects of a runaway fire.

"The purpose was to train our Soldiers to be aware of certain environmental conditions that may be more conducive to starting a wildland fire due to training or due to vehicles, and to make sure that we, as a Guard, protect our federal assets from getting burned down due to training," said Vrtiska.

Vrtiska said the course was part of the Guard's integrated wildland fire management program.

Conducted by members of the Nebraska State Forestry Service, the training consisted of 36 hours of classroom information about the various components that contribute to wildland fires – such as weather, types of fuel and ignition sources – how firefighters react to wildland fires, the different types of tools used to suppress these blazes and how to deploy a fire shelter.

The course ended with a final written test and several outdoor hands-on exercises.

Casey McCoy of the Nebraska State Fire Service said the training was designed to provide the Soldiers the basic-level of education they need to support a fire suppression effort safely and effectively.

"Anyone who goes out on a federally-controlled incident has to have a minimum level of training before they'll even (be allowed)



What's MyTime? Staff Sgt. Phillip Runyan, 1074th Transportation Company, smiles after successfully deploying his fire shelter, March 14. The personal shelters are designed to be a firefighter's last line of defense against an out of control wildfire. (Below) **Tools of the Trade:** Class books lie at a Guard student's place during a break in training, March 14.

on the incident," said McCoy. "This represents the minimum level of training in wildland fire. Basically it's enough training to keep people safe and able to recognize when things are going bad."

One of the benefits of the training, said Vrtiska, is that the Soldiers were able to complete a significant portion of the requirements needed to receive a federal Red Card certification, which firefighters are required to have before supporting fires involving federally-owned land.

"This (the 36 hours of instruction) is one of the most difficult aspects of getting a Red Card certification," said Vrtiska, adding that the Guardsmen must now take a short on-line Incident Command System 100-level course and provide a current copy of their physical fitness test to complete their requirements.

That certification may definitely come in handy, said McCoy, especially considering the potential for wildland fires that many state officials are predicting.

"In general, if you look at history and fire records from the past 50 years, there's a trend upward with

larger fires that are getting there faster," he said. "So, the faster we can get there with resources... the name of the game is rapid initial attack with overwhelming forces as many times as you can."

According to the Soldiers who participated in the course, the training was extremely beneficial.

"It's good to know how to go out and respond to wildfires, especially out in the western part of Nebraska," said Sgt. Mark Colerick, a member of the Scottsbluff-based 1057th Transportation Company. "The hot dry season is coming, so it's probably a good idea to know how to respond in the event that something bad does happen."

Colerick said he was ready to deploy to support several fire suppression missions last year, but was never mobilized. He said he's eager to get that opportunity this year if another round of fire outbreaks occurs.

"I was on my seat ready to go, but because I didn't have my Red Card they kept telling me to wait. So, I never got the chance to get involved," he said. "When I got the chance to do (this course) and get



Robbing A Wildland Fire Of Fuel: Sgt. William Montoya, Detachment 2, 1074th Transportation Company, practices creating a fireline using a drip torch, March 14. The hands-on training was designed to give the Guardsmen the critical skills they need to fight a wildland fire.



Working On The Fireline: A team of Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers use a variety of tools to create the opening meters of a football-field long fire line through the grass and trees of the Camp Ashland training area, March 14. The Soldiers, who were instructed by a team of Nebraska State Forestry specialists, learned how each individual tool contributes to removing the fuel that a wildland fire needs to exist.

my certification, I jumped on it," Colerick added. "I like doing that kind of stuff. I like getting involved in natural disasters and helping out wherever I can."

Spc. Johnathan Weinmaster of the 1057th Trans. Co. agreed, saying the ability to help out a community during a time of need is why he joined the Nebraska Army National Guard in the first place.

"I think it would be great to be able to help the community and show them what the National Guard is all about," said Weinmaster.

That's the type of attitude that the Nebraska Guard may very well rely on should this summer become

a repeat of last year's fire season, said Vrtiska. He added the course should definitely give the state the ability to protect its own facilities, thus reducing lost training time, while also preparing for state emergencies.

"I thought the training went very well," he said. "There were some initial complications with a minor blizzard that threw some challenges at us, but all in all, the Soldiers I talked to saw a great benefit to the training and that they learned a lot of good information."

"We now have Soldiers out there who have at least the basic level of understanding of wildland fires to protect our training sites."

■Nebraska National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry fleet gets meaner, heavier

Armored Knight

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

Soldiers from the Nebraska National Guard's 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) recently got some new 'wheels' when the unit completed a Feb. 22-March 14 fielding of two M1200 'Armored Knights' at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

The Armored Knight is an armored support vehicle designed to assist in performing terrain surveillance, target acquisition and location, and fire support for combat observation laser team missions.

With the 1-134th Cavalry Squadron's forward observers often put in harm's way by simply performing their duties of locating and identifying targets, a vehicle built to allow them to safely and accurately perform their mission is a valuable asset.

According to the Army's weapons system guide, the Armored Knight evolved from the need to provide enhanced protection for Soldiers performing targeting missions in a high-threat environments. It provides precision strike capability by locating and designating targets for both ground- and air-delivered laser-guided ordnance and conventional munitions.

"It's basically designed to go out, find a target, get a location off the laser range-finder...get that grid location and be able to transmit that information back through the channels on what they're seeing," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Greg Nun, a targeting officer for the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade.

Soldiers from the 1-134th Cavalry's Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, Troop A, Troop B and Company C used the training to learn everything they could about the vehicles from representatives sent to ensure a smooth transition of the vehicles to their new permanent home at GTS.

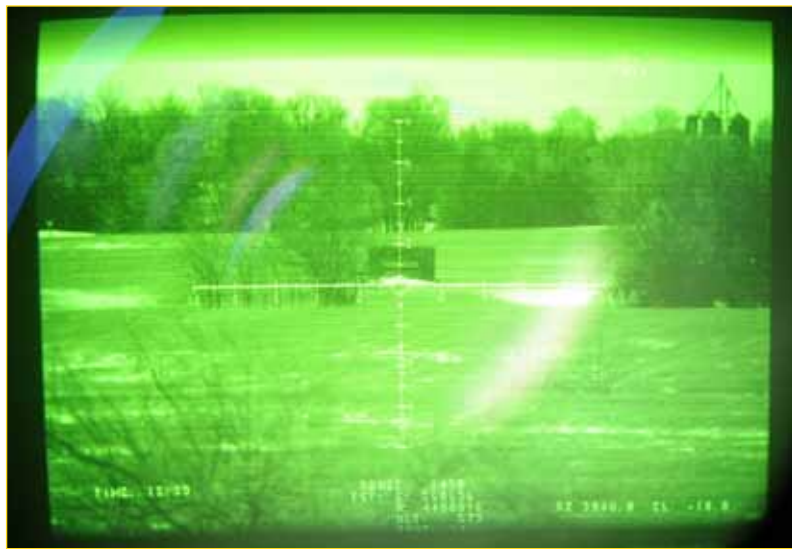
The first part of the three-week training was used to educate mechanics on the maintenance required to keep the new vehicles operating. Next, operators got the chance to drive the vehicles and learn their capabilities. Finally, forward observers tested their skills with the Mission Equipment Package used to perform their specific mission.

Nun said the goal of fielding the vehicles and the ensuing training was simple. He added this training was meant to be the 'crawl' portion of the "crawl, walk, run" training model.

"Because this is a new vehicle to the Nebraska Guard, it's to give the personnel involved that are going to be operating it and maintaining it the hands-on to know what the vehicle is, what it's going to take to keep the vehicle in running condi-



Room With A View: Command Sgt. Maj. Wilfred Uhing, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) command sergeant major, tests out the laser range-finder of one of the Nebraska National Guard's new M1200 "Armored Knights," March 12, during a laser training session at the Greenleaf Training Site where the Nebraska Army National Guard fielded the two new vehicles.



Sighted In: A distant target is viewed through the range-finder of one of the Nebraska National Guard's new M1200 "Armored Knights" during a laser training session at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., March 12. Soldiers from the 1-134th Cavalry's Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, Troop A, Troop B and Company C used the training to learn more about the vehicles, ensuring a smooth transition of the vehicles to their new permanent home at GTS.

tion, and how to operate it properly," said Nun.

"This is teaching them the basics," he added. "Once they get done with this, then it's on them to continue that training to improve their knowledge on how to use it in the real world."

The vehicle operates with a three-person combat observation laser team consisting of a driver, troop commander and gunner. It's equipped with an armored cupola capable of 360-degree rotation with a Mission Equipment Package, which includes a Fire Support Sensor System, also known as FS3. The FS3 serves as the vehicle's laser rangefinder. Another laser called the LRAS3 is used as a target designator for laser-guided munitions. The vehicle is also capable of defending itself with optional cupola-mounted M240B machine guns.

Those who will be regularly using the vehicles are excited to have them.

"It drives pretty well, actually," said Sgt. Jeff Matheson, a forward observer for HHT, 1-134th Cav. "It's comfortable and it's got a lot of power. It's automatic so anybody can get in and drive it. It's like driving your (privately owned vehicle), but it's 32,000 pounds – 32,000 pounds of steel and armor."

Forward observers not only tested the vehicles' capabilities while driving, they also ensured the entire process of calling for fire was successful.

Once Soldiers in the Armored Knight locate and designate a target, they digitally transmit that information to other Cavalry vehicles nearby. There, cavalry personnel may fire munitions at the target or communicate the information to a brigade-level fires-section vehicle, where a decision will be made on what action to take and what weapons will be deployed to neutralize the target.



Photos by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Heavy Equipment: One of Nebraska's new M1200 "Armored Knights" sits atop a hill at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., March 12, for laser training during fielding of the vehicles into the Nebraska Guard's fleet. The 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) received two of the vehicles recently, allowing the Cavalry's forward observers to better perform their jobs.

Armored Knight by the numbers

Engine:	Cummins 260 hp
Fuel:	Two 25-gallon diesel tanks
Range:	400 Miles
Weight:	31,619 pounds
Length:	19 feet, 8 inches
Width:	8 feet, 5 inches
Top Speed:	63 mph
Fording:	60 inches
Crew:	Three person: Driver, commander, cupola operator
Accessories:	Fire Suppression Hydraulic winch Air conditioning and arctic heater

Having armored vehicles with advanced targeting and communications equipment will make the process of calling for fire that much more efficient.

"It's a force multiplier," said Staff Sgt. Chris Moulton, a forward observer with HHT, 1-134th Cav. "It makes us so much more proficient at our jobs and it's a huge enabler on many different levels."

"It's a vital tool for the whole brigade," said Matheson. "It will allow precision-guided rounds."

"I think the accuracy factor that we're looking for in today's battles with low casualty rates – this allows you to do it," he added. "You can really pinpoint a target."

The vehicle's laser systems use global positioning to accurately calculate and relay a 10-digit map grid coordinate to waiting fire teams. The process all but eliminates the need for the Soldiers to make calculations, greatly reducing the possibility of human error in the targeting process.

"It just enhances our capabilities ten-fold," said Staff Sgt. Jake

Whitaker, a fire support noncommissioned officer with HHT, 1-134th Cav. "Everything is digital now and we have the optics to reach out to 23 kilometers and pinpoint a target, so our grids are going to be spot-on versus map and plotting."

"It's so much more precise than a compass and a map," said Moulton.

"Once you have everything calibrated it's literally point and click," said Matheson.

The vehicles have also brought a new sense of confidence to the Soldiers assigned to operate them.

"My confidence level is way up," said Matheson. "Just knowing we have it is a stress reliever. We can feel confident we can go out and do our jobs."

Also being an armored vehicle, "just makes it a little sweeter," he added.

Beyond the benefits the Armored Knights serve in a federal role, they could also be used for a number for state missions.

"As long as you're looking outside the box, the capabilities for this vehicle are endless," said Moulton. "It's one of those things that'll be everything you make of it."

"No matter what the mission is, whether it's a tornado or whatever it is in Nebraska, it'll help out," he added.

"It'll basically go anywhere," said Moulton. "As long as you don't get this thing high-centered you're probably not going to get stuck. You can switch into four-wheel drive on the fly up to 28 miles-per-hour."

Moulton added that the vehicles can drive through up to five feet of water, travel approximately 400 miles before refueling, and are actually quite comfortable regardless of position inside.

"The confidence that it's brought to our platoon and to each individual member is immeasurable," said Moulton. "It's a great asset for our squadron, our company and our brigade."



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Award Winners: Physician Assistants from the Nebraska Army National Guard were named PAs of the year by the Nebraska Academy of Physician Assistants during its 38th Annual Spring Conference held April 11 in Kearney, Neb. (Pictured Left to Right) Capt. Amanda Young, Col. Dan Danaher, Lt. Col. Peter Hunt, Lt. Col. Darin Mongeon, Brig. Gen. Michael Navrkal, assistant adjutant general, Army, Maj. James Allen, Maj. Dennis Rieke, Capt. John Ayers and Lt. Col. Charles Blankman.

Nebraska physician assistants honored

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger
Staff Photojournalist

Nine Nebraska Army National Guard physician assistants were honored as physician assistants of the year by the Nebraska Academy of Physician Assistants during its 38th Annual Spring Conference, April 11, in Kearney, Neb.

During the conference, members of the Nebraska Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve were recognized for their dedication to their profession, to the state of Nebraska and the United States of America for

overseas deployments during the recent war on terror.

Guardsmen honored with the award were; Capt. Amanda Young, Col. Dan Danaher, Lt. Col. Peter Hunt, Lt. Col. Darin Mongeon, Maj. James Allen, Maj. Dennis Rieke, Capt. John Ayers, Maj. Brett Scholtz and Lt. Col. Charles Blankman.

"This is an honor that they give out yearly at the state physician assistants convention but they have not given this award in two years," Lt. Col. Peter Hunt, a physician assistant for Nebraska's Medical Detachment.

According to Brig. Gen. Michael Navrkal, Nebraska assistant adju-

tant general, Army, he couldn't be happier to see Nebraska's Citizen-Soldiers honored for their work both in- and out-of-uniform.

"I really do appreciate this organization recognizing these great Americans," said Navrkal. "It's because of their ability to keep our Soldiers ready. And these individuals and professionals have kept our force ready to go."

"They have made a huge impact in our organization and I can think of no better group to recognize," added Navrkal. "I know they are the best that we've got and I'm grateful for that."

When Disaster Strikes



Photo by Senior Airman Mary Thach

First Aid: A155th Medical Group team treats a “victim” during a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package exercise at the Mead Training Site, April 6.



Photo by Senior Airman Mary Thach

Helping Hands: Members of the search and extraction element of the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package assist a “victim” rescued from a rubble pile during a CERF-P exercise at the Mead Training Site, April 6. Several Nebraska Army and Air National Guard units and one unit from the Iowa Air National Guard used the training to hone their skills by assisting in recovery operations following a simulated natural disaster and chemical spill.

Guard units prepare to respond to nightmarish disaster scenes

By Senior Airman Mary Thach
Staff Writer

When a city is hit by a natural disaster, the destruction can be devastating. Tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires and landslides have affected virtually every corner of the United States, wiping out buildings, chemical plants, businesses and homes.

And when disaster strikes, the state’s governor can call upon the National Guard to respond.

For this exact reason, realistic training is conducted annually to ensure the Nebraska National Guard is prepared to respond to a variety of situations.

Units from the Nebraska Army and Air National Guard and one Iowa ANG unit traveled to the Mead Training Site, April 5-7, to hone their skills by assisting in the recovery of a simulated natural disaster and chemical spill.

The consolidated units are known as Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package, or CERF-P for short. The Guard units combined to create a 197-person CERF-P team.

According to Army Lt. Col. Steven Petersen, 126th Chemical Battalion commander who also commands the CERF-P, April’s training was designed to prepare the Guardsmen to respond to any natural disaster, especially with CBRN elements present.

“(A CERF-P) can be used with a tornado, earthquake, any type of a train derailment in which a chemical substance was leaked,” said Petersen. “It could be used if there was an actual nuclear device set off. It could be used to clean off radiation.”

Within hours on the second day of the exercise, the overcast, windswept prairie of the Mead, Neb., training area morphed into a bustling and fully functioning military facility, complete with tents, machines and medical equipment, as Soldiers and Airmen prepared to respond to a simulated natural disaster.

The Guardsmen were then given a nightmarish scenario: a simulated F-5 tornado had struck the heart of Omaha, Neb., during a College World

Series baseball game at a downtown stadium. The once festive game quickly changed from excitement with cheering fans to shrieks of terror and catastrophe as the tornado tore through the stadium, leaving behind death, destruction and victims buried underneath debris.

The tornado then aimed its wrath toward visitors of the Henry Doorly Zoo, which was packed with adults and children eager to visit the exotic zoo animals. The tornado demolished the IMAX Theater, ripped children from their parent’s arms and left broken bodies amid massive piles of crumbling buildings.

To make matters worse, the tornado then destroyed a nearby chemical plant, causing hazardous material to be released into the air, contaminating everything and everyone in its path.

The CERF-P scenario began just after receiving the call from the Nebraska governor ordering the National Guard to help search for, rescue and decontaminate casualties trapped in the rubble and surrounding buildings.

Petersen said the training was also designed to prepare the CERF-P for its validation later this spring.

The April exercise spanned three days and was modeled after a “crawl, walk, run” approach. The first two days were designed to be learning days, so the exercise was slower paced, with in-depth, hands-on training. By day three, the teams were expected to perform their jobs efficiently and effectively.

Army National Guard Soldiers from the 623rd Engineer Company, 754th Decontamination Company and the 126th Chemical Battalion’s Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment joined Airmen from the Nebraska Air National Guard’s 155th Medical Group and Iowa’s 132nd Mission Support Group and Force Support Squadron Services Flight for the exercise.

While at Mead, the Soldiers and Airmen spent three days working as a joint task force building a decontamination and medical site for victims of a natural disaster. They were required to build a tent city from the ground up and have it fully functioning within 90 minutes.

Petersen said each unit comes to the training with a specific role to play.

“The battalion search and recovery is primarily in charge of going in and recovering fatalities from the incident site,” said Petersen.



Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Command & Control: Members of the 126th Chemical Battalion direct the operations of a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package exercise at the Mead Training Site, April 6.

“The search and extraction team is in charge of... extracting survivors from the rubble and bringing them to the decontamination site. The decontamination folks have three different lanes set up. They have an ambulatory (lane) for people who can help themselves, non-ambulatory for those who are on stretchers, and a (technician) decontamination line to decontaminate our own folks, so anyone who goes into the hot-zone has to be decontaminated.”

The command and control team from the 126th Chem. Bn. directed the overall activities of the exercise. They also coordinated with the incident commander and the Guard organization’s higher headquarters. Search and extraction elements from the 132nd MSG and 623rd Engineer Co. performed surface rescues from structural collapses and removed debris to rescue accessible victims.

The 754th Chemical Co. set up decontamination lines and processed patients through, ensuring they were free from contamination before taking them to the medical element. There, Soldiers assisted injured patients under the close supervision of medical personnel.

The 155th Medical Group provided pre-hospital emergency medical treatment at the rescue site. The medical element worked with decontamination and casualty rescue teams to perform medical triage, treatment and stabilization. They also ensured that Airmen and Soldiers working during the CERF-P exercise were receiving adequate rest periods to avoid injury.

Petersen said it was important to give each unit a chance to learn and operate together prior to their CERF-P validation.



Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Wheeled To Safety: Members of the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package transport a “victim” pulled from a rubble pile during a CERF-P exercise at the Mead Training Site, April 6. During the exercise, the Guardsmen responded to a simulated disaster caused by a tornado ripping through downtown Omaha, destroying a baseball stadium, zoo and chemical plant.

“It’s a great opportunity because it’s a real world mission that they could be called out for. (It also) provides some skills that they don’t normally train on,” said Petersen.

Spc. Monique Pizzuto, a member of Detachment 1, 754th Chemical Co., said this was her first time participating in a hands-on decontamination exercise. She said she was learning the different steps required to decontaminate and dispose of unserviceable equipment. She added that the live, hands-on training was effective because it brought a real-world feel to the training exercise.

Next to the chemical decontamination tent was the personnel decontamination site where every Airman or Soldier who entered the hot-zone had to be decontaminated. Sgt. Clarisa Kumm, a member of Detachment 1, 754th Chemical Co., said the entire decontamination process was an important part of keeping people safe.

“We decontaminate our own Soldiers. We decontaminate the search and extraction team and all the other non-ambulatory and ambulatory Soldiers,” said Kumm. “We take care of our own.”

Petersen said while Army and Air National Guard joint tasks are becoming more frequent, challenges still arise because of different dialects, standards and personnel interaction. Still, he said, everyone is comfortable working together.

Lt. Col. Dan Noble, 155th Medical Group chief of air and space medicine, was one of two medical non-ambulatory doctors in his tent.



Photo by Senior Airman Mary Thach

Cleaning Crew: Members of the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and High Yield Explosive Enhanced Response Force Package “decontaminate” each other during a CERF-P exercise at the Mead Training Site, April 6.

He worked side-by-side with Soldiers transporting injured victims on stretchers from the decontamination tent to the tent in which he was working.

Noble said the two Air Guard units were able to set up their site in an hour, beating the standard by 30 minutes. This speaks volumes about the readiness of the 155th Medical Group because in a real-world disaster, every moment counts, he added.

“This is a very valuable exercise,” said Noble. “It will give people a real chance to perform during a real event.”



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Chip Off The Old Block: Jennifer Gruber shows her husband, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Nick Gruber, how much their son John Harrison has grown during the nine months Gruber was deployed to Afghanistan as a member of the Nebraska Army National Guard's Army 43rd Operational Support Detachment. Gruber was home for the birth of his son, but this was the first time he'd seen his son since the baby was three days old.

HOMECOMING continued from page 1.

Among the family members waiting for their Soldier to return home was Jennifer Gruber and her son John Harrison. Jennifer's husband, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Nick Gruber, hadn't seen their son since the baby was three-days-old.

"I'm probably still going to be in shock for awhile," Jennifer admitted after seeing her husband. "But I am very blessed to have him back home."

According to Gruber, seeing his son again was an absolutely great feeling, but said he knows he has a lot of catching up and learning to do about his son after missing the first months of his life.

Also among the throng of well-wishers was Ashley Small, wife of 1st Lt. James Small, an agricultural specialist with ADT No. 3.

Ashley said she was excited to see her husband, adding she didn't know who was more excited, her or their son Blake.

"It was hard having James away, but I'm glad I had the support of my family to help with Blake and make the deployment go faster," said Ashley.

Once all the Soldiers reunited with family and friends, state and local leaders congratulated the Soldiers and their families during a short welcome home ceremony.

"We really do appreciate the job that you have done," said Gov. Dave Heineman. "It hasn't gone unnoticed. Secondly I want to say thank you to the families. None of us could do this without our families, but particularly when you are away in a combat zone, sacrifices from our families maybe even greater."

"The thing I'm most proud of in our state is every time we have a returning ceremony or a deployment, our citizens turn out in force because we want all of you to know we are behind you and we support you," Heineman said.

Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska's adjutant general, also thanked the families and friends for everything they did to support their Soldiers during the deployment. "The Guard is family and we see that represented here today, both in your physical families of the Soldiers and the extended family of the Nebraska National Guard state employees,

federal employees and Soldiers."

Without the sacrifices of the family members the Soldiers wouldn't have been able to make it through the deployment, said Lyons.

Chief Warrant Officer 5 Eugene Coppersmith, commander of the 43rd OSA Det., reflected on the many accomplishments his team made in Afghanistan.

"In the nine months we were there with the 306th Aerial Exploitation Battalion, the personnel logged 18,000 hours," said Coppersmith. "And of that 18,000, the six members of the 43rd OSA Det. of the Nebraska Army Guard were responsible for 3,600 hours."

"Now to help you put that into prospective," added Coppersmith, "an annual flying program back in Nebraska would ask one of these Soldiers to fly 110 hours in a year. Their average was over 600 hours during the nine month deployment."

Maj. David Cooper, commander of Nebraska's ADT No. 3, spoke of the achievements his team made throughout their nearly yearlong deployment.

"Over the past year the ADT worked diligently to advise, assist and mentor government officials in the Paktya Province," said Cooper. "The highly motivated team picked up where our predecessors, the ADT 2, left off. Without skipping a beat, their drive and dedication allowed for close coordination with officials from all 14 districts of Paktya Province."

"Members of the ADT coordinated and conducted over 260 outside- and inside-the-wire key leader meetings," said Cooper. "They assisted women of Paktya to break through gender barriers through the establishment of women-specific agricultural training and laying ground work for a women's bazaar in Gardez City."

Cooper said the team also coordinated and performed construction on modern farming techniques and designed to extend the shelf-life of locally-grown produce.

Coppersmith and Cooper both said they were happy that they accomplished their missions. More importantly, they added, they were happy that every Soldier who deployed to Afghanistan was now home safe with their families.



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Official Welcome: Gov. Dave Heineman speaks during a homecoming ceremony for members of Nebraska's Agribusiness Development Team No. 3 and 43rd Operational Support Airlift Detachment March 14, at the Joint Force Headquarters building on the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. Both units returned from deployments to Afghanistan on the same day.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Patriotic Hug: Sgt. 1st Class Lucas Poppe, a member of Nebraska's Agribusiness Development Team No. 3, holds his 4-year-old niece, Brylie, March 14, at the Joint Force Headquarters building on the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. Returning to Nebraska from a nearly yearlong mission to Afghanistan, Poppe and 15 other members of ADT No. 3 were welcomed home along with six members of the 43rd Operational Support Airlift Detachment.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Colorful Homecoming: Maj. David Cooper, commander of Nebraska's Agribusiness Development Team No. 3, hugs his wife, Sarah, and stepdaughter, Kiley, March 14, at the Joint Force Headquarters building in Lincoln, Neb., after returning to Nebraska from a nearly yearlong mission to Afghanistan. Members of ADT No. 3 worked to rebuild Afghan agricultural systems and infrastructure destroyed by decades of war.



Veterans Suicide Hotline bumper sticker.

State unveils effort to combat veteran suicide

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Gov. Dave Heineman was joined by veteran and military leaders to kick-off Nebraska’s “Not One More Life” campaign to bring public awareness for help that is available to at-risk veterans, March 22, in Bellevue, Neb.

The “Not One More Life” campaign is specifically focused on the risk of emotional issues that could result in suicide. The campaign will include bumper stickers promoting the 1-800-273-TALK crisis line and radio public service announcements.

“As veterans, we have a commitment to serving our country, as well as looking out for one another,” said Heineman, an Army veteran. “The well-being and safety of those who have served our country and their families is a high priority, and we must make every effort to avoid losing even one more life. Awareness that fellow veterans and family members care, and that help is always available, is important for helping veterans in need of support.”

The “Not One More Life” campaign is made possible through a partnership between Nebraska Chapter 7 of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and The Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs.

The governor was joined by Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska National Guard adjutant general; John Hilgert, director of the Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs; DAV state adjutant, Jim Shuey and DAV national area supervisor John Kleindienst; Marty Riemenschneider of the Nebraska Broadcasters Association, as well as veterans representing a wide variety of Nebraska veteran and military groups, showing wide support for the campaign.

“‘Not One More Life’ is a rallying cry by those of us who have served to look out for each other. This is a lesson taught from day one by the military - to be a good battle buddy and watch each other’s back. ‘Not One More Life’ is a reminder that wars are timeless because veterans carry scars forever, and we encourage everyone to be vigilant and watch over those at risk,” said Hilgert.

The radio public service announcements are available for download at the governor’s website: www.governor.nebraska.gov and the Department of Veterans Affairs: www.veterans.nebraska.gov. The Nebraska Broadcasters Association will make the PSAs available to their members throughout the state.

Additionally, the “Not One More Life” slogan will be printed on 5,000 bumper stickers, sponsored by DAV. The bumper stickers list the nationwide crisis line, 1-800-273-8255, and remind callers to “Press 1 for Veterans.”

The crisis line is available to veterans, their friends and families and anyone who is at risk of hurting themselves or others. The bumper stickers will be distributed to County Veteran Service Officers who serve veterans in all 93 counties. DAV will distribute bumper stickers to disabled veterans in Nebraska.

“This is an issue that we’ve been working to address as a National Guard organization,” said Lyons. “Our key message to our service members and veterans is that it is a sign of strength to seek help.”

“We also realize it takes a team effort. For our veterans’ families and the community at large, you play an important role. You are in a position to notice when a veteran begins to show signs that he or she is struggling or considering suicide. Please assist us in getting these veterans the help that they need so that not one more life is lost to suicide.”

(Editor’s Note: Information for this article comes from a news release from the Nebraska Governor’s Office).

Nebraska Soldier invited to attend buddy’s Medal of Honor ceremony

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Oct. 3, 2009, at Combat Outpost Keating in the Kamdesh District, Nuristan Province of Afghanistan started like any other. But by the end of the day, a battle with Taliban fighters would eventually lead to 37 Army Commendation Medals, 27 Purple Hearts, 18 Bronze Stars, nine Silver Stars... and now, a Medal of Honor.

One of those Silver Stars and Purple Hearts belong to 1st Lt. Bradley Larson, a platoon leader and CH-47 Chinook pilot with Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion in Grand Island, Neb. Then-Sgt. Larson was a member of the active Army’s Troop B, 361st Cavalry, 4th Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, deployed to the Afghan outpost.

Larson had just taken over a guard post near the COP’s entry control point when an estimated 300 Taliban fighters launched an organized, well-armed attack on the COP. Throughout the day and into the night, Larson and the 52 other Soldiers fought off the enemy and defended their outpost.

COP Keating sat in a valley surrounded by mountainous terrain and was, according to Larson, the most northern base for U.S. troops in Afghanistan, making any rescue or backup hours away.

During the battle, one of Larson’s best friends, former Staff Sgt. Clinton L. Romesha, though injured, led the fight to protect fallen Soldiers, provide cover to those needing medical assistance, and reclaim the outpost that would later be deemed “tactically indefensible.”

For his actions, Romesha was awarded the Medal of Honor during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House in Washington, D.C., Feb. 11. Romesha personally invited Larson to attend the ceremony, which was also attended by several hundred including Romesha’s family, then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno and Sgt. Maj. Of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III.

“He called up and said he was going to receive it and asked if I would come be there when he got it,” said Larson. “He was my best friend in the Army... I worked directly under him for four years.”

Before the ceremony started, Larson said the room was pretty somber and proper, until some welcome comic relief came from one of



Courtesy Photo

Proud Moment: 1st Lt. Bradley Larson, a platoon leader and CH-47 Chinook pilot with Company B, 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion, poses with former Staff Sgt. Clinton L. Romesha following a White House ceremony to present Romesha the Medal of Honor, Feb. 11. Romesha earned the medal for his actions during an Oct. 3, 2009, attack on a combat outpost in Afghanistan. Larson was awarded a Silver Star and Purple Heart for the same battle.

the youngest members in the audience.

“His little boy Collin, before Romesha even came into the room, was kind of throwing a fit,” said Larson. “I think he’s two or three maybe...he was running around the place playing hide-and-seek from his mom behind the podium. It was actually really cute and it really, really eased the tension – everybody just relaxed after that.”

Several other members of the COP Keating team were also on hand for the momentous occasion.

“It was quite an honor,” he said. “To see my best friend receive the Medal of Honor – it was like he received it for everybody that was there and for the guys we lost. I don’t know what word to use, but I felt very honored that he would think of me in his recognition of what he had done that day.”

“It was pretty emotional,” he added. “Knowing what he had to do to receive it.”

Following the ceremony, Romesha and his guests were treated to a banquet where they

were able to speak with the president, first lady, senior military leaders and past Medal of Honor recipients.

“It was a lot of fun,” said Larson. “Just talking to General Odierno, all those guys are really nice guys. They were really interested in some of the stories that we had. It was pretty relaxed for being in the White House with the top officers in the military.”

Larson, who is currently attending additional pilot training at Fort Rucker, Ala., said Romesha is a great guy with a Midwestern disposition and work ethic. And with all the pomp and circumstance surrounding a Medal of Honor, he thinks the full weight of what happened hasn’t hit Romesha quite yet.

“He’s still kind of in shock, really,” said Larson. “He travels all over giving speeches and talking with people. I don’t think it’s really sunk in what he received. But regardless whether he received it or not, he single-handedly saved the lives of a lot of people that day, so he definitely deserves it.”

HAGEL continued from page 1.

prise means confronting “the principal drivers of growth in the department’s base budget – namely acquisitions, personnel costs and overhead,” Hagel said.

The Pentagon’s biggest budget challenge is not its top-line budget, he said, but “where that money is being spent internally.” Spiraling costs to sustain existing structures and institutions, to provide personnel benefits, and to develop replacements for aging weapons platforms will, if unchecked, eventually crowd out spending on procurement, operations and readiness, he said, which are the budget categories that enable the military to be, and stay, prepared.

Hagel said the U.S. military has grown more deployable, expeditionary, flexible, lethal “and certainly more professional” since 9/11. “It has also grown significantly older -- as measured by the age of major platforms – and it has grown enormously more expensive in every way,” he said.

The department will “get out ahead” of challenges, Hagel said. He said he has told senior leaders across the department and the services that “we are all in this together, and we will come out of it together.”

Hagel said the military’s modernization strategy “still depends on systems that are vastly more expensive and technologically risky than what were promised or budgeted for.” The department must develop an acquisition system that responds more quickly and effectively to the needs of troops and commanders in the field, he said – one that rewards cost-effectiveness “so that our programs do not continue to take longer, cost more and deliver less than initially planned and promised.”

On the personnel front, Hagel said, DoD leaders must determine how many military and civilian people they have, how many they need and how to compensate them for their service. He said that process will involve questioning the right mix of civilian and military members, the right balance between officer and enlisted service members, and the appropriate troop strength dedicated to combat, support

and administrative duties.

Hagel said he also advocates a hard look at defense organization. The military’s operational forces, its battalions, ships and aircraft wings, have shrunk dramatically since the Cold War era, he noted. “Yet the three- and four-star command and support structures sitting atop these smaller fighting forces have stayed intact, with minor exceptions,” he added, “and in some cases, they are actually increasing in size and rank.”

Hagel said the review will examine funding for those headquarters and support structures, along with DoD elements including the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the combatant commands and the defense agencies and field activities.

“The military is not, and should never be, run like a corporation,” Hagel said. “But that does not mean we don’t have a good deal to learn from what the private sector has achieved over the past 20 to 30 years, in which reducing layers of upper and middle management not only reduced costs and micro-management, it also led to more agile and effective organizations and more empowered junior leaders.”

The secretary acknowledged making dramatic changes in acquisition systems, benefits and force structure could prove unwise, untenable or politically impossible. “Yet we have no choice but to take a very close look and see how we can do all of this better,” he said.

Hagel noted his two immediate predecessors as defense secretary – Leon E. Panetta and Robert M. Gates – each led efforts to cut costs across the department. But sequester cuts and budget uncertainty have “led to far more abrupt and deeper reductions than were planned or expected,” he added.

“Now, DoD is grappling with the serious and immediate challenges of sequester — which is forcing us to take as much as a \$41 billion cut in this current fiscal year, and if it continues, will reduce projected defense spending by another \$500 billion over the next decade,” the secretary said.

The secretary said the department’s enduring mission – defending the nation and advancing America’s strategic interests – must be approached in the context of “unprecedented shifts in the world order, new global challenges and deep global fiscal uncertainty.”

The 21st-century security landscape is marked by the threat of violent extremism from weak states and ungoverned spaces in the Middle East and North Africa, Hagel said. Other security issues, he said, include the proliferation of weapons and materials; increasing access to advanced military technology among state and nonstate actors, risks of regional conflict that could draw in the United States, and “the debilitating and dangerous curse of human despair and poverty, as well as the uncertain implications of environmental degradation.”

Hagel said cyberattacks, “which barely registered as a threat a decade ago, have grown into a defining security challenge” which allows enemies to strike security, energy, economic and other critical infrastructure with the benefit of anonymity and distance.

All in all, Hagel said, the world is combustible and complex, and America’s responsibilities are enormous.

The military’s role in meeting those responsibilities is essential, he said, but as part of a total government approach.

“Most of the pressing security challenges today have important political, economic, and cultural components, and do not necessarily lend themselves to being resolved by conventional military strength,” the secretary noted.

Defense leaders need time, flexibility, budget certainty and partnership with Congress to effectively explore new approaches to acquisition, personnel, and overhead costs, he said.

“The goal of the senior leadership of this department today is to learn from the miscalculations and mistakes of the past drawdowns, and make the right decisions that will sustain our military strength, advance our strategic interests, and protect our nation well into the future,” Hagel said.

Enlisted Soldier Division

Spc. Dakota Kingham

Pfc. Jacob McCall

Pfc. Abdulaay Ndiaye

Spc. Joseph Pace

Spc. Tyler Petty

Noncommissioned Officer Division

Staff Sgt. Timothy Hartmann

Sgt. Luke Katz

Sgt. Aaron Rockford

Sgt. Micah Schroeder

March Mania

2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition

Enlisted Champion

NCO Champion

Photo illustration by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Into The Chilly Night: Soldiers competing in the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition begin the opening steps of an early-morning eight-mile road march, March 20, at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb. The march took place in temperatures that hovered in the mid-teens.

Weather proves challenging at annual Best Warrior contest

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

The U.S. Army has long prided itself in its Soldiers' ability to accomplish their missions in the face of uncompromising situations, difficult and changing environments, and overwhelming odds. The same could easily be said for the nine Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers who traveled to Camp Ashland and the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb., for the Nebraska Army National Guard's Best Warrior Competition, recently.

During the course of a nearly four-day competition, the Soldiers – four noncommissioned officers and five enlisted Soldiers representing units from across Nebraska – competed against each other in a marathon-like contest designed to test their military skills, physical endurance, mental stamina and tactical agility.

Even the weather, which ranged from bone-cutting winds, to snow, sleet and rain during the March 18-21 competition, provided a level of realism unmatched in recent contests.

According to Command Sgt. Maj. Eli Valenzuela, state command sergeant major, the competition truly was designed to find the best enlisted Soldier and best NCO in the Nebraska Army National Guard and prepare them for the next stages of the Army-wide Best Warrior competition.

"They push themselves pretty hard," said Valenzuela about the Soldiers who are selected by their battalions to compete in the annual state competition. "The competition itself is pretty hard and it's supposed to be difficult. Not everybody can do the Best Warrior competition and do well in it."

"These individuals that we select, we test them physically, we test them mentally to see what they really have. The competition, the way it's built, pushes them mentally and physically to the breaking point to see if they can carry on," he said. "And they do an excellent job every time we get them out there, because they will do what we ask them to do and they'll do it in the best (way) that they can."

Competing in this year's contest were:

Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Opening Night Jitters: Sgt. Maj. Richard Burch, special missions sergeant major, provides members of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition an opening briefing on the competition, March 18, at Camp Ashland, Neb.

Enlisted Category:

- Spc. Dakota A. Kingham, a parachute rigger with Seward's Detachment 2, 165th Quartermaster Company. A native of Norfolk, Neb., Kingham has three years of military service.
- Pfc. Jacob R. McCall, a chemical, biological, radiology and nuclear specialist with Grand Island's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation. A native of Johnstown, Neb., McCall has a year of military service.
- Pfc. Abdulaay S. Ndiaye, a chemical specialist with the Omaha-based 754th Chemical Company (Reconnaissance and Decontamination). A native of Dakar, Senegal, Ndiaye has nearly two years of military service.
- Spc. Joseph C. Pace, a vehicle driver with the Chadron-based 1057th Transportation Company. A native of Chadron, Neb., Pace has two years of military service.
- Spc. Tyler Petty, a joint nodal network systems operator/maintainer with the Omaha-based 234th Network Support Company. Petty, a native of Bellevue, Neb., has two years of military service.

Noncommissioned Officer Category:

- Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hartmann, a Warrior Leader Course small group instructor with Camp Ashland's 1st Battalion, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute). Hartmann, a native of Seward, Neb., has more than 11 years of military service.
- Sgt. Luke E. Katz, a team leader with the Beatrice-based Company C, 1-134th Cavalry (Long Range Surveillance). Katz, a native of rural Jansen, Neb., has six years of military service.
- Sgt. Aaron M. Rockford, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with Lincoln's 1167th Brigade Support Company. Rockford, a native of Chambers, Neb., has six years of military service.
- Sgt. Micah J. Schroeder, a wheeled vehicle mechanic with the Kearney-based 1195th Transportation Company. Schroeder, a native of Gibbon, Neb., has five years of

military service.

For the next three-and-a-half days, beginning on the evening of March 11, these nine Soldiers would find themselves locked in a competition that few, if any could've fully foreseen. At the end, two would emerge as the winners and qualify to represent Nebraska in the upcoming regional National Guard competition.

All, however, would learn new skills and a new appreciation for their ability to withstand the best that the Nebraska Army National Guard and Mother Nature could throw at them.

Day 1: Opening Night Jitters

The evening dinner had just been eaten when the nine selected Soldiers, each accompanied by a unit sponsor who would provide them limited assistance during the competition, shuffled into a small auditorium at Camp Ashland, Neb. The Soldiers, like Soldiers often do, chuckled and joked amongst themselves as they waited for the opening briefing to begin.

Their eyes, however, provided a far-different view into how each was approaching the competition. Some stared at the board ahead, as if trying to pull some hidden, but useful knowledge from the vacant space. Other eyes darted from side to side, as if trying to take measure of the others who sat next to them to determine who would most likely mount the most serious attempts.

Suddenly, silence descended upon the group as Sgt. Maj. Richard Burch, a former Nebraska state command sergeant major who recently served a tour as the Army National Guard's top national enlisted Soldier, cleared his throat and then spoke through a wide smile.

After welcoming the competitors to the competition and talking about the goals of the competition and his hopes that it would enable one or both of the winners to compete effectively at the regional, and possibly even the national-level matches, Burch spoke about what the Soldiers could expect in the days ahead.

"There's one standard," he said, "the Army standard."

See BEST WARRIOR on 9.



Taking Cover: Staff Sgt. Timothy Hartmann, 1-209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), takes cover behind a car during the March 19 stress-shoot task of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.



On Target? Sgt. Micah Schroeder takes a compass reading during the March 19 stress-shoot task of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.



Aimed Throw: Sgt. Luke Katz, Troop C, 1-134th Cavalry (Long Range Surveillance), prepares to throw a practice grenade at an “enemy” bunker during the March 19 stress-shoot competition at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Opening Sprint: Spc. Dakota Kingham, Detachment 2, 165th Quartermaster Company, pulls a 150-pound Skedco during the March 19 stress-shoot task of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

BEST WARRIOR continued from page 8.

If nothing else, that lesson would be hammered home time and time again in the hours and days that followed.

Day 2: Physical Fitness and a Mystery Event

Following a late night filled by a written essay assignment and a two-hour bus ride to the Greenlief Training Site, the Soldiers arrived at their barracks on the northern edge of the sprawling prairie installation about 10 p.m.

Rest for the Soldiers would be short, however, as just a few hours later they were awoken for a 5:30 a.m. physical fitness test, taken in temperatures that hovered near freezing. The cold weather, which tightened muscles and shortened breaths, would become an ongoing theme throughout the competition, which, including the written essay and fitness test, consisted of 22 separate tasks.

Probably the most memorable, if there was one, occurred after a hasty breakfast and a bus ride out to the training site’s marksmanship ranges. There, the Soldiers finally learned what would be expected of them as they completed what Burch had craftily called a ‘mystery event’ the night.

According to Burch, the idea of the mystery event – in this case a timed, multi-discipline stress shoot that required the Soldiers to complete several marksmanship tasks surrounded by several other physically and mentally challenging tests – came from the national-level matches he helped set up last year.

“In a way, ours is probably even tougher,” Burch would say following the match. “For example, in our event the Soldiers had to sprint 100 meters while pulling a Skedco filled with about 150 pounds across a flat field. At the National Guard competition last

year, the Soldiers had to do the same thing, but they pulled it downhill.”

Along with the shooting matches, the timed mystery event also required the Soldiers to accurately determine a back azimuth using a military compass, conduct five-second rushes between damaged cars and concrete barriers, engage several different targets with practice grenades, high-crawl for approximately 50 meters through a mucky combination of gravel and ground-up tires, while also successfully engaging targets with their rifles and pistols from a variety of positions.

“This is designed to be a gasser,” Burch had said earlier.

The competitors were quick to agree.

“It’s great. It’s hard and tough, but we’re hanging out there” said Ndiaye shortly after completing the event in around 30 minutes.

“The hardest part is communicating from

station to station,” he added between labored breaths. “Not everybody can do it... I couldn’t think of a better way to spend my spring break, though.”

Pace agreed.

“It’s a little tough, but there’s nothing wrong with that,” said the Chadron truck driver who attends college at nearby Central Community College in Hastings where he’s studying welding. “It definitely tests you.”

“A lot of opportunities to do things that I’ve never done before,” Pace added about the competition, equally out of breath. “It’s a lot of fun to have more things to do... just the experience and all the different people you get to meet.”

The competing NCOs also said they were getting a lot out of the first long day of competition, adding that the Best Warrior contest was forcing them to relearn many of the skills they’d forgotten from basic training, or learn new skills that they’d never been exposed to.



Final Push: Spc. Dakota Kingham, Detachment 2, 165th Quartermaster Company, high crawls between shooting points during the March 19 stress-shoot task of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition at the Greenlief Training Site near Hastings, Neb. The stress-shoot task was a timed competition in which the Soldiers were required to complete a number of physical and marksmanship tasks.

“It’s tough... very challenging,” said Rockford, who before tackling the mystery event was tested on his ability to accurately call for artillery fire onto a distant target using the Greenlief Training Site’s Call-For-Fire Simulator.

There’s always something... like this,” he said. “I had never done this before.”

Rockford said the key to doing well was having both a long and a short memory.

“Just trying to study up and stay on top of things and keep moving on, forgetting about your last performance and focusing on the next thing... it’s tough,” said Rockford, who is studying Exercise Science with a Nutrition minor and coaching endorsement at Wayne State College.

Even the competition’s most experienced competitor said he was getting a lot out of the competition and hoped to take some of the lessons back to his unit.

“It’s pushing everybody,” said Hartmann, who helps instruct future NCOs as a Warrior Leader Course small group leader at Camp Ashland, shortly after the Stress Shoot event. “I had no idea that we’d be doing anything like this. This event is a kicker.”

According to Hartmann, one of the biggest lessons of the Best Warrior competition was personal in that it was helping him define both his strengths and his weaknesses. It was also helping him better understand the

See BEST WARRIOR on 10.



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Forced Entry: Pfc. Abdulaay S. Ndiaye, 754th Chemical Company (Reconnaissance and Decontamination), prepares to kick open a gate during the March 20 urban operations task of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.



Fighting Back: Pfc. Jacob R. McCall, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation, fires a pair of paintball rounds from his training weapon at what he believes is a hidden sniper during the March 20 urban operations task.



Taking A Quick Peek: Sgt. Luke Katz, Company C, 1-134th Cavalry (Long Range Surveillance), peers around a wall with his training weapon during the urban operations task of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition, March 20, at the Greenlief Training Site.

BEST WARRIOR continued from page 9.

relationship between physical and mental fitness.

“Doing this event, you’re doing just non-stop cardio and then you have events where you have to stop and do skills like throwing the hand grenades and the high crawls... it’s just things that Soldiers haven’t done in a while.”

Hartmann said even though the competition was in its early stages, what it was going to take to win the championship was already becoming clear. “I think it’s going to come down to being a jack of all trades and a master of none. You can’t just be good at one or two things... you kind of have to be well-rounded.”

Hartmann’s words would definitely prove prophetic as the competition moved into its third and fourth days.

Day Three: Darkness, Cold, and Urban Warfare

Following the conclusion of the second day’s activities, the Soldiers were bussed back to Greenlief’s main post where they had an opportunity to eat and prepare for the next day’s activities.

Like the previous day, Day 3 started early with a 5 a.m. road march that required the competitors to navigate along the Greenlief’s gravelly back roads through pitch-black darkness, the only light illuminating their way coming from the few headlamps that several



Cold Walk: Illuminated only by a headlamp and a Humvee’s headlights, a Soldier breathes heavily during the March 20 road march.

enterprising Soldiers had brought with them, an occasional passing train or shooting star that sizzled as it crossed the horizon, and a distantly trailing ambulance.

Complicating matters was the fact each Soldier, already burdened by approximately 50 pounds of military gear each was required to carry, also had to contend with the unseasonable cold that had descended upon Nebraska.

With temperatures hovering around 17 degrees, the darkness quickly swallowed Soldiers’ visible forms and caused the sounds of boots grinding against the gravel to sharply echo through the air. The competitors soon found that their normally reliable water backpacks had frozen up, forcing them to ration their hip canteens even further during the 90-minute to two-hour-long event.

According to Valenzuela, the event served to further prove the Soldiers’ mettle.

“When you saw the Soldiers coming in with frost and ice on their hats... that was something to see... I think it proved to them that they could push themselves farther than they thought they could go.”

Following the march and a roadside breakfast, the NCOs and Soldiers split up, with half moving to a simulated village to conduct the urban operations tasks, while the others began testing on a variety of Army Warrior Tasks and Soldiers Stakes. They switched places around noon.

For those competing at the village site, the task tested the Soldiers’ combat skills, ability to think on their feet and diplomatic tools.

For example, before entering the village to conduct what was described in their briefing as a combat patrol, the Soldiers first had to approach a town elder – played by Sgt. Maj. Mark Felker – to learn

valuable bits of information about potential enemy activities and locations.

For some, uncomfortable or little experienced in working in such environments, pulling intelligence from Felker proved difficult. For others who understood the value of bartering – in this case exchanging food from their Meals Ready to Eat to meet demands for local assistance – gaining information was much easier.

However, even with enemy intelligence secured, the Soldiers quickly found out how difficult operating in an urban terrain can be as they were quickly engaged by “enemy combatants” wielding a variety of paint-ball shooting weapons and noisy improvised explosive training devices almost immediately.

To score well, the Soldiers had to quickly think on their feet, move under fire and successfully clear suspected enemy buildings. The Guardsmen were also graded on their ability to communicate to their teammates, call in a medical evacuation helicopter and respond to a surprise media interview.

According to Hartmann, the final competitor to move through the village, the entire day had proved extremely challenging and rewarding.

“Today’s gone very well,” said Hartmann as he used a Q-tip to clean paint from his ear. “It’s not all about competition. I’m definitely learning a lot since I’ve been here.”

“Physically, I’m really drained. It was hard for me to just get up this morning, but it’s really great mentally because it shows you can really push yourself,” he said, adding that the Soldiers were not only pushing each other competitively, but also were beginning to form a sense of esprit-de-corps.

“This is good because it just shows the importance of training,” Hartmann said. “There are just only so many things that you can prepare for. You’ve just got to be flexible, especially during situations like this where there’s really no right or wrong way to do things.”

Day Four: Physical Competition Gives Way to Mental Stamina

After arriving back at Camp Ashland around 8 p.m. the night before, the Soldiers again had an early morning as they traveled out to the Mead Training Site to tackle

See BEST WARRIOR on 11.



Reacting To An Unexpected Injury: Staff Sgt. Timothy Hartmann, 1-209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), calls out instructions to a “wounded police officer” who simulated accidentally stepping on a hidden land mine, March 20, during the urban operations task of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.



Checking His Work: Pfc. Jacob R. McCall, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-376th Aviation, records the numbers listed on a target during the March 21 land navigation task at the Mead Training Site.



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes



Little Housekeeping: Staff Sgt. Timothy Hartmann, 1-209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute), cleans orange paint from his ear after being struck by a training round during the urban operations task of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.



Saving A Life: Spc. Michael Pace, 1057th Transportation Company, provides first aid to a "wounded civilian police officer" during the urban operations task of the 2012 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition.

BEST WARRIOR continued from page 10.

both a night and day orientation course.

Although the requirements of the event – locating three points in near-pitchblack darkness in 60 minutes during the night course, and finding six points in 60 minutes during the daylight tasks – put each Soldier’s physical and mental endurance to the test, the weather conditions again proved to be a significant wildcard.

Running from point to point through the grassy, hilly training area, the Soldiers again had to deal with cold, strength-sapping winds filled with icy sleet that bit at exposed skin and caused eyes to water.

According to Katz, who had just returned home from his Army Ranger School course a short time before the start of the competition, he was impressed by both the Best Warrior events as well as the level of competition he’d been receiving from the other NCOs.

“It’s been intense,” said Katz, who delivers mail in Lincoln for the U.S. Postal Service. “Just coming back from Ranger School, I kind of got put in this at the last second. I thought I was pretty ready for this situation and this competition. Overall, it’s really been a good learning experience.”

After winning both the night and day navigation tasks, Katz admitted that his ace in the hole was probably the experience he gained while attending Ranger School. “Land navigation... you do that a lot in Ranger School. Coming here pretty fresh on it and pretty good at it, that kind of (allowed me to) kick it out of the ballpark.”

Another, probably less expected, benefit was simply knowing how to deal with the unseasonable elements. “I’m pretty used to this, having gone to Ranger School in the winter,” said Katz as he gestured toward the sleet now pouring from the slate-gray clouds. “I’m ready for anything, but trust me, I don’t like being in the cold anymore than anyone else.”

According to Schroeder – a Kearney-based mechanic who, when not taking college courses, works for Cabelas – the physical nature of the competition was taking a definite toll.



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Hardware Winners: The top placers in the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition pose with their hardware. Pictured are (from left): Spc. Dakota Kingham, second (Enlisted Category); Spc. Michael Pace, winner (Enlisted Category); Pfc Jacob McCall, third (Enlisted Category); Staff Sgt. Timothy Hartmann, second (NCO Category); Sgt. Luke Katz, winner (NCO Category), Sgt. Micah Schroeder, third (NCO Category).

“My legs are starting to get burnt out,” said Schroeder, who also competed in last year’s Best Warrior Competition. “The competition has definitely stacked up pretty well this year. There are a lot of guys who know what they are doing and are in pretty good shape.”

“Some of the events are a little different... I would say it’s a little bit tougher this year, especially with that mystery event. Switching from individual movement drills to the stress fire situation... that was tough,” he said.

Schroeder said he definitely sensed the competition was shifting into its final sprint as all that remained were a number of mental competitions – such as standing before a board of senior NCOs and answering questions, taking a written test, and repeating the NCO Creed. “It’s going to take someone who’s balanced overall,” he said. “Whoever is the best balanced between physical fitness, mental endurance and knowledge will probably be the one to go on.”

Pace agreed. Having just won the enlisted land navigation challenges, he also felt the mental aspect of the final events would prove decisive.

“I think the board is going to make a big difference,” he said, adding no matter how the competition finished out, he was taking

a number of new skills and experiences home with him. “A lot of experiences in a lot of different things... just bettering myself because we don’t get to do these types of things very often, like land navigation and shooting.”

“I’m bettering myself in many different ways.”

Banquet of Champions

Finally, after three-and-a-half days and 22 separate challenges, the Soldiers gathered just steps away from where they had first met. This time, the competitors sat in the Camp Ashland dining facility, waiting anxiously for the news of who had won.

First, though, they deserved to hear the words of praise that each had earned from the state’s highest leaders.

Valenzuela was particularly enthusiastic in his praise, borrowing dialogue from the movie, *A League of Their Own*. “It’s the hard that makes it great,” said Valenzuela to the Soldiers. “If it wasn’t hard, everyone could do it.”

“The last three days of bad weather, that was hard on you. Snow, sleet, rain, wind and incredible cold... I applaud you guys for what you’ve done,” he said. “You make us proud. You are Soldiers who will do anything that we ask you to do and you did it great.”



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Final Push: Sgt. Luke Katz sprints through icy sleet to be the first Soldier to complete the land navigation task of the 2013 Nebraska Army National Guard Best Warrior Competition, March 21, at the Mead Training Site.

Brig. Gen. Michael Navrkal, assistant adjutant general, Army, echoed those sentiments. “I’ve talked a lot about being able to shoot, move, communicate and treat your buddy. That’s what (being a Soldier) is fundamentally about. That’s what this Best Warrior competition is about.”

It’s this ability, said Navrkal, that links this year’s competitors with the countless American Soldiers who have come before them.

“It’s this same stuff that you all just went through these past three days. It’s the same thing that we’ve done countless times, whether it be in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, World War II or any other conflict that this nation has been in,” he said. “You were in some pretty tough conditions. The tasks didn’t change. The standards didn’t change. The conditions made it harder, but you sucked it up and you did it.”

Finally, the winners and other finalists were named.

Taking home the enlisted championship was Spc. Joseph C. Pace while Spc. Dakota A. Kingham and Pfc. Jacob R. McCall placed second and third respectively.

Winning the NCO championship was Sgt. Luke E. Katz while Staff Sgt. Timothy D. Hartmann and Sgt. Micah J. Schroeder took the silver and bronze medals.

Pace and Katz will now represent Nebraska in the Guard’s Regional Best Warrior Competition to be held in Texas in May.

Both Pace and Katz agreed that the winning their divisions was an unbelievable feeling.

“It hasn’t happened a lot in the past, but I’ve found something that I’m pretty good at,” said Pace, who said the biggest difference for him was finishing first in the road march and land navigation events.

“I’m pretty tired, but it’s well worth it,” he added. “I’d do it again.”

“I feel great,” said Katz. “This was an awesome experience.”

Like Pace, Katz credited his finishes in the road march and land navigation events, as well as his physical fitness score, as helping him win the gold medal.

Mostly, though, the two Soldiers said they felt extremely humbled at having been given the opportunity to compete against their fellow Army Guardsmen.

“Everybody did great... everybody gave it their all,” said Pace.

“I thought they were all great,” added Katz. “They were all tough competitors in their own aspects. We’ve developed some pretty good friendships.”

“It was just a great learning experience and a great chance to meet all these great Soldiers from across the state of Nebraska.”

RETENTION continued from page 1.

Meet the retention non-commissioned officers:

Staff Sgt. Anita Hays wanted to help the Nebraska Army National Guard's solve its retention problems. Still, Hays, a career counselor for the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, knew she had some big shoes to fill when she was asked to become one of two 'full-time' retention noncommissioned officers for Nebraska.

"This year is a difficult year for retention," said Hays. "Last year, the operational tempo of multiple deployments kept many of our Soldiers engaged and serving."

With the operational tempo slowing down, Hays said commanders are making retention decisions based on 'Quality Boots Initiative' data relating to such things as a Soldier's weapons qualification and ability to pass annual physical fitness tests.

"Looking back during the deployment years, (the Quality Boots Initiative) was a secondary consideration," said Hays.

"But not now," she said. "As the operation tempo has slowed down, Soldiers (who) are not performing at an appropriate level... are being encouraged to improve or risk being released."

Hays said one trend that officials are seeing throughout the state is Soldiers, who might otherwise reenlist, are disqualified due to non-satisfactory standings within the Guard.

Hays added that bonus money and other incentives are not always a driving force for Soldiers.

"After deployments some Soldiers are simply tired of the responsibility of the Nebraska National Guard and would like to continue on with their civilian career progression," said Hays, "or the lack of potential growth or openings in a specific MOS."

One of the hardest parts she said is that the Guard is actually losing Soldiers faster than the organization can retain them.

"The amount of Soldiers that are eligible for reenlistment is substantially lower because so

many Soldiers are flagged for Army physical fitness test, height and weight or other issues," said Hays.

"Another reason we are losing a number of Soldiers is due to interstate transfers as the economy and family responsibilities are moving them to other states," added Hays.

Hays said she has learned much from each Soldier and situation, adding she's noticed that Soldiers' reasons to join the Guard are often the same reasons that cause them to either stay in or get out.

"I have learned a lot going back and reviewing the 1,315 cards from units all over Nebraska to see why (Soldiers) joined the Nebraska National Guard in the first place," said Hays. "It is interesting to see if the Soldier and the Nebraska National Guard were able to achieve those goals."

"Their reasons include continued educational benefits, specific training, or providing service for their country," added Hays.

Hays said she is always available to help a Soldier, no matter the situation.

"I try to find out what their goals are within the Guard," said Hays, "and help them to accomplish those goals,

whether it is continued education, bonus money, career progression or movement of (Military Occupational Specialty) or unit."

On the positive side, Hays said the state has re-introduced the 'Extend to Defend' program and the 'Reenlistment Battalion Certificate,' both of which are given to Soldiers who extend for three or more years.

Nebraska is also appealing to the Soldiers' competitive nature in hopes that it will help fuel recruiting and retention efforts, she said.

"Recruiting and Retention is currently holding a contest for units," said Hays. "It is a free movie night for the units in each major subordinate command that have the highest retention rate as of the end of April to see the new 'Man of Steel' movie at the unit's closest movie theater. The movie is being sponsored nationally and exclusively by the National Guard."

Grand Island Soldiers tell local high schoolers about Guard opportunities

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger
Staff Photojournalist

Approximately 75 students traveled to the Nebraska National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb., Feb. 28 to learn more about what the Nebraska National Guard has to offer. The event was designed to promote options for traditional, part-time Soldiers in the Grand Island-based 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion.

The students came from a number of area schools including Grand Island High, Sutton High, Hastings High and Central City High.

According to Staff Sgt. James Dinville, a recruiting and retention noncommissioned officer for the Nebraska Army National Guard, the event was designed to showcase current unit openings in the helicopter mechanic and petroleum supply specialist career fields.

While at the facility, the students had the opportunity to learn more about the Nebraska Army National Guard and the benefits it offers. They also toured the facility and got inside the unit's Chinook helicopters while learning more about the Grand Island aviation unit from Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers currently working as helicopter repairers and petroleum specialists. The Soldiers spoke with the students about the important roles they play in helping the helicopter unit accomplish its



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Heightened Education: Maj. Dustin Wilkie, Nebraska National Guard Army Aviation Support Facility No. 2 commander, talks to students from the local area about CH-47 Chinook helicopters at the AASF No. 2 in Grand Island, Neb. The Feb. 28 recruiting event was designed to promote openings in the Grand Island-based 2-135th General Support Aviation Battalion.

multifaceted mission.

"This taught me more about the career paths within aviation," said Jesus Maese, a Grand Island Senior High junior. "I learned about all the missions, too. I found out about all the cool things the Nebraska Army National Guard does with the Chinooks, like fighting fires and picking up troops."

Soldiers, including the current helicopter repairers, petroleum specialists and the recruiters who helped put on the event, agreed the night was an overall success based

on the questions and feedback they received from the students.

"It went really good," said Dinville. "I had a lot of kids ask me questions and ask for my phone number to follow up with any more questions they might have and if they wanted to enlist."

"The most important part of an event like this is promoting the National Guard," added Dinville, "getting the students and people of the communities aware of what the National Guard does (during) wildfires, blizzards and floods."

diers who are not retention-eligible due to Army Physical Fitness Test issues and those are a lot of issues we can't control."

"Next I do as much background on the Soldier (as I can), whether that is talking to their first-line leaders or readiness NCOs," he added. "It helps build a little bit of history about (the Soldiers) before we call and talk to them."

According to Wyrick, the biggest thing he looks for when researching the Soldiers is finding out if there are any issues and then matching them with resources that can help solve them.

"I personally think you have to talk to them on a professional, but personal level," said Wyrick. "That's why I think spending a lot

of time on their background helps when I am talking to them, so I kind of have some benefits and ideas already in mind of what that Soldier might need."

Soldiers need to know that there is always someone to talk to if they have any questions or issues, he added.

"Sometimes Soldiers may not know who to talk to or may be a little intimidated to talk to their chain of command," said Wyrick. "That happens, especially for younger Soldiers. It's my job to help track down who those folks are and get them turned around. A lot of times they just need someone to talk to other than people in their unit."

Wyrick says helping people is one of the best parts of his job.

"The most rewarding part of my job is getting to talk to the Soldiers, understand their history and helping them out," said Wyrick. "If you ask that right question,

you kind of open up that issue (affecting them) and can get it addressed."

According to Wyrick, continued access to the Guard's educational benefits is a major reason why many Soldiers are deciding to stay in the organization.

"We still have a lot of Soldiers working on their degrees," said Wyrick. "Whether they are working on their associate's, bachelors or even masters, that's a big draw for Soldiers."

"There are a lot of Soldiers that want to serve their state and country, too," added Wyrick. "We still have a lot of Soldiers in our ranks that joined because of 9/11. But there is a small percentage that want to deploy, so right now some Soldiers are getting out because they feel that they will not be able to deploy anytime soon."

The key to retention, according to Wyrick, is to help the Soldier no matter the challenge.

"No matter what they feel their challenges are, there are tons of resources in the National Guard," said Wyrick.

"Sometimes when a Soldier is outside their normal formation and they are talking to an outsider like myself, they have the tendency to talk a little more freely about their personal and family issues."

Holding Their Own

"Retention is an issue we take very seriously in Nebraska," said Hays, "but we are holding our own compared to other states. Nebraska is currently ranked at No. 25 with a 98.5 percent mission rate."

Hays said she believes it's an encouraging number that indicates just how involved Nebraska's senior leadership has been. Wyrick couldn't agree more.

"We are going to have our challenges, but making sure the information is out there at all levels helps tremendously," said Wyrick.

"Myself, Sgt. Wyrick and all of the units work daily with individual Soldiers to provide current information and support to every Soldier," said Hays. "It is our mission to help Soldiers make the best choices for their needs and hopefully continue their service to the Nebraska National Guard."

Retaining Nebraska's Fighting Force

First of a Multi-part Series

RE-ENLISTMENT BONUSES

You may be eligible for:

- 6 YEAR EXTENSION = \$10,000
- 3 YEAR EXTENSION = \$5,000
- Both bonuses are lump sum payments, and contracts must be signed between 365 - 91 days to ETS.

- CONUS or OCONUS
- Must be E-7 or below
- Under 13 years service
- Can only have one incentive at a time (Bonus, Kicker, SLRP)
- AGR and Technicians are not eligible to receive this incentive policy
- Cannot be excess
- Must be DMOSQ (Some policy exceptions)
- Meet other requirements in policy

For more information contact your Unit Readiness NCO or Unit Career Counselor.

NEBRASKA
NATIONAL GUARD
NATIONALGUARD.com

Fremont recruiting event may also affect unit retention

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Members of Fremont's Troop B, 1-134th Cavalry, had the opportunity to participate in a small "show-and-tell" operation in March when their unit hosted a "Guard for a Day" recruiting activity for local high school students.

"The goal for today is to build awareness about what the National Guard is all about, what we do on a weekend drill or what it was like (when the unit) deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq," said Staff Sgt. Anne Kobza, unit recruiter, as she watched around a dozen students mingle with Troop B Soldiers, who showed off the various equipment they use and the food they sometime eat during domestic and overseas missions.

"For me, it's just a way to interact with (the students), either as a recruiter or on a personal level, so that they can get to know me better," she said about the March 2 event. "That's what my job is all about. I love the position I'm in, being able to talk about the Nebraska National Guard, which is also something I love and care about... it's a feel-good for me."

For Cody Muth, a Fremont High School senior, the opportunity to come out to the Fremont armory and see what the Army National Guard does on a weekend drill was simply too good of an offer to turn down.

"It's actually really cool," said Muth as he peered through an enormous scope the cavalrymen use to conduct reconnaissance or surveillance missions from hidden sites. "I (also) saw some night vision stuff... that was pretty cool."

For Muth, who said his father served in the U.S. Marine Corps and grandfather continues to work at Offutt Air Force Base, the day was an opportunity to learn more about the National Guard before making his final decision about his future. At this point, he said, he's considering joining either the National Guard, U.S. Air Force or Marines.

"I've talked with (my dad and grandfather) about stuff, but to actually see it for real, that's pretty cool," said Muth.

The same goes for Kendrick Smith, a Fremont High School



Photos by Maj. Kevin Hynes

What's For Lunch? Spc. Bryan Stroyek, a member of the Fremont-based Troop B, 1-134th Cavalry, explains the various components of a Meal, Ready to Eat, to a group of high school students during the unit's "Guard For A Day" open house held March 2 at the Fremont Readiness Center.



Lunch, Army Style: Collin Spencer, a Fremont High School sophomore, reacts while reading the contents of a Meal, Ready to Eat.

freshman whose father James spent 20 years in the Fremont unit. Like Muth, Smith said he wants to pursue a military career, so being able to come to the armory and learn more about current equipment and training seemed like an



Getting A Good View: Zach Tucker, a Fremont High School freshman, takes a look through a scope used by members of Troop B, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron, when performing their reconnaissance and surveillance mission.

important thing to do.

That comment was echoed by fellow freshman Zach Tucker. "I really want to join the National Guard because I think it would be a good thing for me," he said, adding that he also enjoyed trying out the Soldiers' night vision equipment. "It's

pretty cool because they showed us how they can go through buildings undetected. I didn't think it would be that good."

According to Kobza, events like Fremont's Guard for a Day also have an important side benefit. Along with getting potential future

Soldiers interested in what the Nebraska Army National Guard has to offer, it also helps remind the state's current members why they joined in the first place.

"This is just as good for the unit as it is for the kids who are here today," she said. "The unit is able to show their skills and the training they've had and remind themselves why the bigger picture really matters. It definitely has a retention element attached to it because they see this new generation coming in and get to talk to them about the skills they've learned by being in the National Guard."

"In a way, it reminds them that what they're doing really is pretty important and pretty cool," said Kobza.

Spc. Bryan Stroyek is a case in point. A native of Omaha, Stroyek joined the Nebraska Army National Guard nine years ago this coming September. He's a veteran of both Iraq and Afghanistan.

He said he enjoyed talking to the high school students about the equipment he gets to use and the experiences he's had.

"It's nice because you can tell everyone is super interested," said Stroyek. "I always tell my friends, 99 percent of the world will never get the chance to work with the M-240 machine gun or the other gear that we get to."

That's part of the reason he said he went to his locker early on during the event and pulled out his helmet and personal gear and offered them to any student who "wanted a new Facebook photo."

"You want to keep the flow coming in... we need people who are excited to be here," he added.

Spc. Nicholas Winey agreed. "A lot of the kids are just curious about what we do and some of the stuff that we've had opportunities to have hands-on experiences with," he said. "Some of this stuff, you're not going to get out in the civilian world. I think they're maybe shocked and impressed by it."

That's why Winey said supporting the event was time well-spent.

"Absolutely," he said. "This is the best way to show people what we do... and it's also a good way to get them interested in us and hopefully bring some good people into the unit."

And, perhaps, keep some good Soldiers in it as well.

Nebraska Air Guard lawyer appointed to fill university regent post

By Tech. Sgt. Jason Melton
Staff Writer

He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Juris Doctor from the University of Nebraska College of Law.

He is the owner and operator of a farm in Pawnee County, an attorney and managing partner of a law firm in Beatrice, and the staff judge advocate general for the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing in Lincoln.

Maj. Robert M. Schafer learned the moral benefit and importance of work and its inherent ability to strengthen character growing up in a small agricultural community in Nebraska. It was that work ethic that fostered in him a deep appreciation for the environment, education and willingness for public service.

He has been an advocate of "the good life" for the people of Nebraska almost his entire life.

Now, at age 45, Schafer is able to better serve the public, representing District Five on the Nebraska University Board of Regents.

Schafer said he has not always had political aspirations, but admits he has entertained the idea of a seat on the Nebraska University Board of Regents in the past.

"This time the timing was right and I threw in my name," he said.

Gov. Dave Heineman appointed Schafer to the board of regents to fill the vacancy left by Lavon Heidemann, who resigned from the board in February to become the state's lieutenant governor.

Schafer will serve out his predecessor's term on the NU Board of Regents for about two years and said he plans to seek election to the position in 2014.

"I am looking forward to getting a campaign



Courtesy Photo

Happy Family: Maj. Robert Schafer, judge advocate general for the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing, poses with his wife, Andrea, and daughters, Brooklyn and Addison after being appointed to the University of Nebraska Board of Regents by Gov. Dave Heineman. Schafer will fill the vacancy left by Lavon Heidemann, who resigned from the board in February to become the state's lieutenant governor.

team together," said Schefer. He added that he plans to start raising money, knocking on doors and meeting with the people of his district face-to-face by the New Year.

Schafer established a name for himself in the Nebraska National Guard 28 years ago. Schafer received his commission after clerking for the judge advocate general at the Joint Force Headquarters of the Nebraska National Guard.

After serving in the Army National Guard for 20 years, he joined the Nebraska Air National Guard and has been the staff judge advocate at the 155th ARW since 2005.

"The Guard has been with me longer than anything else in my life besides my parents and brothers," said Schafer. "It is the second most important decision I have made, after asking my wife to marry me. It's been a great career decision and I wouldn't do it any differently."

Like many Soldiers and Airmen, Schafer joined the Guard at age 17 for the GI Bill and tuition assistance. He said he had planned on staying in for only one enlistment.

Since joining the Guard Schafer said he has formed many life-long friendships and business partnerships with colleagues he has met throughout his Guard career. "The Guard is like my second family now," he said.

As a regent, Schafer said he wants to fight to keep the tuition assistance program in place amidst future budget cuts by the federal and state government.

"I feel strongly about the importance of education and the benefits the National Guard offers to young people, he said. "Education has been proven to be the one thing that can make the most difference in somebody's life, especially when it comes to breaking the cycle of poverty."

His appointment to the board of regents adds another line to the long list of public and private organizations with which he is involved. Time-management and a highly qualified and trustworthy team are very important, he said.

"I have great teams, both at my law practice and in the Air National Guard. I don't want to be just another member of the Guard or a regent or run a law practice without giving everything my full attention."

First and foremost, however, he said it is important that he spends time with his wife, Andrea and two daughters.

The University of Nebraska is something that Schafer has always had a special interest in.

"I believe that the University of Nebraska started as a land-grant institution," he said. "One of my goals, as a regent, is to find ways to keep the best and brightest students in this state."

He said the best way to keep them in Nebraska and draw others to the university is to create public and private partnerships with the business communities across the state to provide scholarships for research and to keep tuition affordable.

He said he also plans to draw on his agricultural background to work with the other regents and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at UNL to continue to promote Nebraska as an agricultural institution.

Schafer describes his supervisory style as no different from the way he supervises at his law practice or in the Air National Guard.

"It's all about surrounding yourself with good people that you know and trust to do the right thing and empowering them with the ability and authority to make decisions and carry forward and execute the overall plan of the university," said Schafer.

"In the end it comes down to the same thing for students at the university and Airmen on base," Schafer said. "It's about doing right by them, and for them, and helping them move their careers along."

Leadership Changes

Andersen takes command of 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade

By **Spc. Heidi Krueger**

Staff Photojournalist

Soldiers of the Nebraska Army National Guard's 67th Battle Field Surveillance Brigade welcomed Col. Brett W. Andersen as their new commander during a March 10 change of command ceremony held at the 'Spirit of 67' Armory in Lincoln, Neb.

Andersen took command from Col. Michael Deger in front of Soldiers of the 67th BFSB, distinguished guests, friends and family.

"As the brigade moves into its new chapter," said Deger, "it is time for new leadership and Colonel Brett Andersen is exactly the kind of commander needed to take this organization to higher levels of readiness and performance."

Deger enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1985 with Wayne's Company A, 1-134th Infantry. In 1987 he was commissioned as a second lieutenant and returned to Co. A, 1-134th Infantry, where he served as

a platoon leader until 1990. From 1990-91 Deger served as a Training, Advising and Counseling (TAC) officer with the Nebraska National Guard Military Academy before returning back to Wayne to serve as the executive officer from 1991-92.

Deger was then re-assigned to the NNGMA as the training officer and personnel officer from 1992-95 and then as the senior TAC officer/Officer Candidate School Company commander from 1996-97.

From 1997 to 2005 Deger served in a variety of senior staff positions at the bat-



Andersen



Deger

talion, brigade and directorate levels. In 2006 he served as the commander for 2nd Battalion 209th Regional Training Institute, before deploying to Afghanistan in 2007 as the commander of the 1st Brigade Embedded Training Team. After the deployment, Deger was assigned to several other state-level positions before becoming the director of Manpower and Human resources in 2010.

Andersen enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1985 with Co. E, 2-134th Infantry. He received his commission in

1996 and served as a computer systems programmer with Headquarters State Area Command, Nebraska, before being assigned as a platoon leader with Troop C, 1-167th Cavalry, from 1997-98.

From 1998 to 2002 Andersen served as the automation officer for Joint Force Headquarters, Nebraska. In 2003 Andersen was assigned as the personnel officer for 92nd Troop Command. He then deployed to Afghanistan as the training and plans mentor and took command of the Soldier Training Brigade. Following his deployment, Andersen served in a variety of senior staff positions at battalion, brigade and directorate levels. Andersen also served as the 67th BfSB commander in 2011 during the latter part of its deployment to Iraq in support of Operation New Dawn.

Along with several state-level full-time assignments, Andersen currently serves as the director of Information Management in the Lincoln-base Joint Force Headquarters-Nebraska.

Offutt-based Air Guard group welcomes new commander

■ Former early unit member returns to Offutt to lead Guard group described as 'best-kept secret in the United States'

By **Maj. Kevin Hynes**

Editor

The Nebraska Air National Guard's "premiere associate unit in the United States Air Force" welcomed its fourth commander when Col. John R. Anderson assumed command of the Offutt Air Force Base's 170th Group during a change of command ceremony held in Air Force Weather Agency's auditorium, March 9.

Anderson, who had served as the vice wing commander of the Lincoln-based 155th Air Refueling Wing, succeeds Col. James R. Stevenson Jr., who has taken Anderson's vacated position.

According to Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac, assistant adjutant general, Air, the change is another chapter in the 170th's fairly young history, during which it has quietly made critically significant accomplishments as part of the active Air Force's 55th Wing.

"I think it would be safe to say in our assessment of the 170th (that it) is probably the premiere associate unit in the United States Air Force. It is perhaps the world's best-kept secret in the United States in some ways, too," said Bohac. "I'm grateful for all of the efforts of all of the previous commanders – not only in the 170th, but also in the 55th – for their efforts and willingness to tell our story... the Total Force story."

"I can tell you that we value this relationship. We value what we bring together with the 170th and 55th for the combatant commander, for the United States Air Force and for the citizens of the United States of America," he added. "We're really proud to serve right alongside with you in that effort."

Bohac added that Stevenson, who served as the commander of the 170th since July 9, 2011, contributed immeasurably to the development of the organization and the partnership with the 55th Wing.

"To know that (Col. John Rouch, the commander of the 55th Wing) can turn to us and say, 'I need,' and



Stevenson



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

New Commander: Col. John R. Anderson (right) accepts the organizational colors of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 170th Group from Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac during a March 9 change of command ceremony held at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., where members of the organization support the active Air Force's 55th Wing.

we can say, 'We can,' and the trust that's inherent in that relationship each and every day, it is something to be valued," said Bohac, adding Stevenson's work in furthering this trust can't be overemphasized.

"That's not insignificant and it's not widely known across the Total Force, but it's lived here each and every day. And maybe you were the critical leader at a critical time when we needed to continue that relationship," Bohac said. "I'm extremely proud of what you've accomplished during your time as the 170th Group commander."

Prior to assuming command, Stevenson was the commander of the 155th Operations Group in Lincoln, Neb. He received his commission through Officer Training School in 1989 after graduating with a bachelor of Science degree from the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

He earned his pilots wings in 1990 and began his flying career as a first assignment instructor pilot in the T-37B at Vance Air Force Base, Calif.

While at Vance, he also served as an undergraduate pilot training instructor, class commander and squadron executive officer. Stevenson was reassigned to the 347th Composite Wing at Moody Air Force Base, Ga., in 1994 where he became a C-130 pilot. He also served as a tactician, chief scheduler and mobility flight commander.

Stevenson joined the Nebraska Air National Guard in 1997, serving in a variety of roles including flight commander in the 173rd Air Refueling Squadron, chief of training, chief of tactics, director

of operations and squadron commander.

Stevenson is a command pilot with more than 4,000 flying hours, which includes combat and contingency operations as part of Allied Force, Southern Watch, Northern Watch, Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

Stevenson said he was humbled to have had an opportunity to lead the organization.

"Early in my tenure, I asked the group, 'If Gen. (Mike) Hostage, (the commander of Air Combat Command), were to ask (Brig.) Gen. (Donald) Bacon and now Colonel Rouch, 'Can you do the mission without the 170th?' he would probably have to answer, 'Yes sir, I can.' Our goal was for him to add, 'But I don't really want to,'" Stevenson recalled.

"I think that's really important," he said. "The 170th Group may only be one percent of the 55th Wing's size, but we strategically have far greater impact."

That impact, he said, is in helping the 55th Wing deliver vitally-needed airpower to combatant commanders and enabling them to take the battle to the enemy without having to worry what's over their heads.

"Even our nation's latest Medal of Honor winner received his award in person because he could call upon airpower to save his own life and the lives of his comrades," Stevenson said.

Stevenson added that any success he achieved during his tenure is the result of hard work by the members of the organization.

"In my assumption of command

speech, I told you that I was unsure why General Bohac selected me, because I was very aware of the talent already in the 170th. Your performance during my time merely validated my high opinions of you all," he said, adding he used former President Ronald Reagan's advice about surrounding oneself with talented people and then delegating authority to them. "It was impossible not to surround myself with talent in the 170th... because of how good you are, it worked out pretty well for us and in the process you made me better, too."

According to Bohac, the incoming commander is well-prepared for the challenges inherent with taking over a dynamic unit like the 170th Group. This is in part due to the fact Anderson has already served in a number of key unit leadership positions during the organization's short history.

"It's with a high degree of trust and fidelity that you come to this position," Bohac told Anderson.

"John, you're entrusted with something special. You're entrusted to grow the relationship and charged with continuing the mission in the manner that the previous commanders have done here," said Bohac. "And I trust that you will."

Prior to serving as the 155th ARW vice commander, Anderson served as the commander of the 170th Group's 238th Combat Training Squadron. Anderson received his commission from the Reserve Officer Training Corps in 1988. He earned his navigator's wings at Mather Air Force Base, Calif., when he graduated as an electronic

warfare officer in 1989.

Anderson's first operational assignment was with the 343rd Reconnaissance Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base where he upgraded to instructor/evaluator and mission director. Anderson was reassigned to a classified location in 1994 to serve as special projects test director, flight commander and director of Test.

In 1995, he was selected for the Joint Air Force Institute of Technology/Air Force Test Pilot School program. Following graduation, Anderson was assigned to the 413th Flight Test Squadron at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., where he served as special projects test director, flight commander and director of Test.

Anderson attended Air Command and Staff College in residence, graduating in 2001. He was then reassigned to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, where he served at the Global Hawk Program Office, with the BIG SAFARI program and as a U.S. Air Force Flight Test Center representative.

Anderson joined the Nebraska Air National Guard in 2003. He served as a flight commander in the 170th Operations Support Squadron and as the 170th Group executive officer prior to commanding the 238th Combat Training Squadron.

Anderson said he's excited to have the opportunity to return to the 170th Group.

"This is a great day. I am truly humbled to stand before you as the fourth commander of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 170th Group," he said.

Anderson added he looks forward to furthering the organization's already lustrous legacy.

"To the members of the 170th Group, my priorities as commander are simple: We're going to continue the outstanding partnership that we have with the 55th Wing in executing its global mission. We will maintain readiness to support our state mission as well," said Anderson.

Anderson also echoed Stevenson's comments, telling the members of the unit to take pride in the roles they play in ensuring that combatant commanders are able to bring decisive airpower to bear in the continuing war with America's enemies.

"Because of what we do, they're able to successfully engage the enemy and live to fight another day," he said. "You should be extraordinarily proud of this fact and continuously motivated to make sure that you bring your 'A' game every day."

"This (along with the unit's recent work during the 2011 floods) is what makes you a Guardsman. Be proud of your heritage and be ever ready should the call come to protect your friends and neighbors."

Guard sergeant hailed as hero for aiding boy trapped beneath car

By **Spc. Heidi Krueger**
Staff Photojournalist

Sgt. Eric Wilford was on his normal way to work after dropping off his 11-year-old daughter at daycare before school, May 10, when he saw something out of the ordinary a block in front of him.

Wilford, a standard installation/division personnel system data analysis for Joint Force Headquarters, Nebraska Army National Guard, saw a car swerve off a street and onto a yard near 8th and A Streets in Lincoln, Neb. Approaching the scene, Wilford said what he saw sent shivers down his back. “All I (saw) were feet underneath the car,” added Wilford.

Wilford quickly stopped his car and jumped out to aid a little boy trapped underneath the wheel of a car.

According to Wilford, as he ran around the side of the car, he started making an assessment of the young victim. “He was stuck under a tire

of the car, bleeding from his head,” he said.

Wilford said around 15 to 20 people were already standing around the yard, calling 911 to get help. Wilford, however, immediately jumped into action, deploying every skill he had learned during his recent Army Combat Lifesaver Course.

“I went back to my car and grabbed a rag,” said Wilford. “You are always taught to grab the cleanest thing you can to stop the bleeding.”

With paramedics on their way, Wilford continued to apply pressure to the boy’s head with the rag.

“I laid there with the rag on his head, talking to him and reassuring him he was going to be fine until the paramedics got there,” said Wilford. “The cops showed up first and they came up and talked with me, but didn’t take over. They let me stay there with him as we waited for the paramedics to actually lift the car up before they took over.”

Wilford said it seemed like an eternity until the paramedics ar-

rived, even though it was probably only 10 to 15 minutes.

Once the paramedics removed the car from atop the boy, they took over from Wilford and then transported him to the hospital.

Wilford went back to work.

Later that day, he stopped by the hospital on the way home from work to see how the boy was doing.

“He was in great spirits,” said Wilford, “but he didn’t understand why it happened to him.”

Wilford said he was just happy that the only thing that happened was the laceration to his head. “No broken bones, which is amazing,” said Wilford. “Even the nurses couldn’t believe he only had a laceration to his head.”

Wilford admitted that after helping the little boy, his mind kept turning to what-ifs... what if it was his daughter? What if no one was there to help her?

“That could have been my daughter under there,” said Wilford. “She rides her bike to school, so she could have crossed the street at the same time.”



Courtesy Photo

Honored Guest: Sgt. Eric Wilford poses with Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler and Lincoln Fire Chief John Huff after the 5th annual Lincoln Fire and Rescue Awards Ceremony, April 9, in Lincoln, Neb. Wilford was awarded the Citizens Certificate of Merit for helping save the life of a young boy last May.

He added that if his daughter was ever injured in a similar way, he hoped someone would be there to help.

“If it was my kid, that is what I would’ve wanted done,” said Wilford. “Somebody to be there to help and talk to her... (to) minimize the damage as much as possible.”

A few months ago, Wilford’s actions were formally recognized when he was awarded the Army Commendation Medal for his actions. He was also presented with the Citizens Certificate of Merit

from the City of Lincoln, Neb., on April 9.

Wilford said he was surprised by the awards, adding he simply did what anyone else would’ve done.

“I didn’t expect anything like this, honestly,” said Wilford. “Especially almost being a year away.”

Wilford knew it was just luck that he was there at that moment.

“I talked to the boy’s mom at the hospital and she said ‘I was an angel from God,’” said Wilford.

“But I was just helping out in any way I could.”

Former teacher now leading Guard’s Officer, Warrant Officer Candidate School programs

By **Maj. Kevin Hynes**

The Nebraska Army National Guard’s commissioning school, once affectionately known as the “West Point on the Platte,” received a new commander, March 9, when Lt. Col. Will Prusia assumed command of the 2nd Battalion, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) from Lt. Col. Gary Ropers during a ceremony at Camp Ashland’s Memorial Hall.

Col. Mark Stockstell, 209th RTI commander, officiated over the ceremony.

According to Stockstell, Ropers made significant accomplishments during his tenure as the commander of a battalion that overseas both the Officer Candidate School and the Warrant Officer Candidate School programs.

“Gary, you’ve been a tremendous officer here. I can’t say enough about how proud I am of you and how you developed the OCS program,” said Stockstell. “You’ve worked very hard. You’ve built it back up to the prestige that it once had.”

Stockstell said that prestige is evident through simple mathematical comparisons. Several years ago, the OCS program, which was established on June 29, 1957, as the Nebraska Army National Guard’s primary way of commissioning officers into its ranks, was graduating as few as three to five officers a year. “Now we’re back to where we need to be,” said Stockstell about the two current OCS classes that number approximately 30 officer candidates. “We need to sustain that because we need to continue to develop future officers.”

Stockstell added Ropers should take a tremendous amount of pride away from his tour of duty at Camp Ashland.

According to Ropers, who had served as the battalion commander since June 2010, he was extremely happy to have played a part in helping the Nebraska Army National Guard develop its much-needed future leaders.

“We’ve grown a tremendous amount,” said Ropers as he looked out on a formation of battalion staff members and current members of the OCS program.

“It’s been a pleasure watching you come together and grow into an OCS class,” he told the senior candidates while also issuing a challenge to the junior OCS class to take what they were about to learn and apply it to their upcoming tasks.

Ropers also thanked his battalion staff and the members of the WOCS program for making his tenure unforgettable. “I will miss each and every one of you,” he said.

Ropers was born in Broken Bow, Neb., in 1964. He grew up in Sargent, Neb., where he graduated from Sargent High School in 1982. He received a bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Science from Kearney State Col-



Ropers



Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Accepting The Colors: Lt. Col. Will Prusia (left) receives the colors of the 2nd Battalion, 209th Regiment (Regional Training Institute) from Col. Mark Stockstell, March 9, during a change of command ceremony at Camp Ashland, Neb.

lege in 1987.

Ropers enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard in 1981 as a tank turret mechanic with Company C, 1-195th Armor in Broken Bow, Neb. Upon commissioning in 1991 he was assigned to Detachment 1, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1-168th Field Artillery in Ogallala, Neb.. as the fire support Officer.

In 1994, Ropers was assigned to Battery B in Sidney, Neb., where he served as an executive officer, fire direction officer and battery commander. In 1997, he moved to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1-134th Infantry, where he served as an executive officer and motor officer.

Ropers was assigned to the 209th RTI at Camp Ashland, Neb., in 1998 and served as training, assessing and counseling (TAC) officer, OCS commander and assistant operations officer. He also served as aide-de-camp in 2003 for Nebraska Lt. Gen. (Ret) Roger Lempke.

In 2009 Ropers was assigned as plans officer for the 41st Rear Operations Center (Area Support Group) in Omaha.

Ropers deployed in May 2007-08 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, where he commanded one of the first Police Mentor Teams (PMT) in the Kandahar Province located in Southern Afghanistan. The team worked with three District Police Headquarters on training and mentoring the local Afghanistan National Police (ANP) on plans, supply and administrative operations.

Ropers will now be transferring to the Joint Force Headquarters where he will serve as the State Personnel Support Services chief.

According to Stockstell, he has complete confidence in Roper’s successor, who also comes to the assignment with deep experience.

“Will,” said Stockstell, “it’s a great team and a great staff. They’re dedicated to developing young leaders. You’ve got a good cadre to work with and I look forward to working with you over the next year or two.”

Prusia began his military career as a military policeman on active duty after graduating from Fremont High School in Fremont, Neb., in 1984. He served in Miesau, Germany, and at Fort Meade, Md., attaining the rank of sergeant before leaving active duty in January 1989.

In January 1989, Prusia began his career in the Nebraska Army National Guard with Company D, 2-134th Infantry, while participating in the Army ROTC Simultaneous Membership Program. He served with Company D until he was commissioned a second lieutenant from the University of Nebraska – Kearney’s ROTC program in May 1993.

After completing the Infantry Officer Basic Course, Prusia was assigned to Co. D, 1-134th Infantry, where he served as a platoon leader. Prusia then served in various assignments with the 1-195th Armor including tactical intelligence officer, scout platoon leader, and operations officer (air).

In November 1999 he was promoted to captain and served as the motor/rail transport officer and logistics officer with the 734th Transportation Bn. Prusia served as commander of Co. B, 735th Main Support Bn., from September 2000-02 when he returned to the 734th Trans. Bn. where he served as the personnel officer and motor/rail transport officer until May 2004.

From 2004-09 Prusia was assigned as an officer strength manager with the Nebraska Army National Guard’s Recruiting Command. He was then assigned to the National Airborne Operations Center as a current operations officer and logistics planner.

Prusia then served as executive officer of Agribusiness Development Team 3, deploying with the ADT in April 2012 to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Prusia redeployed in November 2012 and began his assignment as the deputy state Army National Guard personnel officer for Joint Force Headquarters.

Camp Ashland officer receives business award

By **Maj. Kevin Hynes**

When the members of the current Nebraska Army National Guard officer candidate class listen to their company commander talk about effectively managing their people, they’re not just getting advice based on experiences gained while serving in the active Army as an infantry officer or as a headquarters detachment commander during a deployment to Iraq.

They’re also listening to an officer who was recently acknowledged as an up-and-coming civilian business leader.

Maj. John S. Berry Jr., managing partner of a Lincoln and Omaha law firm, was recently awarded the Lincoln Independent Business Association’s “Young Professional Award.” According to Berry, the Officer Candidate School company commander, the award is given out annually to recognize the organization’s up-and-coming members.

Berry said he’s grateful for the honor.

“Just being recognized as young is an honor in itself,” said Berry, laughing as he explained how the award is designed to recognize those professionals under the age of 40 who are actively involved in the Lincoln business community, have demonstrated leadership skills, and achieved success in their individual endeavors.

Berry, who said his firm has grown significantly since he served as the 67th Area Support Group’s headquarters and headquarters detachment commander during its deployment to Iraq, the skills he’s learned in the Guard are applicable to his civilian career.

“I think that’s one of the biggest advantages of staying in the Nebraska National Guard in terms of the education and training that I’ve received,” said Berry, who joined the Guard in 2000 while attending law school at Creighton University. “Our law firm has grown to the point that we now have more than 20 employees and we’ve expanded into Omaha.”

“As a managing partner, not only do I have to carry a full case load as an attorney, I also have to manage the day to day operations. The things that I’ve learned in the military is not only to have a person in charge of current operations, but also one in charge of future operations,” he said. “I’ve also learned a lot about how to run effective meetings and, more importantly, when not to have meetings.”

That’s pretty significant, he said, when managing lawyers who already have a heavy case load that are bringing significant profits into the firm. Berry added that meetings must be well-organized and time-efficient.

Berry said he’s also had to learn how to maximize his employees’ time to accomplish the myriad of tasks that crop up each day. “That’s one of the things that I’ve definitely picked up in the Guard.”



Berry

Passing the Torch

■Nebraska Army Guard Soldier’s career winds down as son begins his own

By Tech. Sgt. Mark Wyatt
Joint Task Force Jaguar

As one career ends and another begins, a father and son from the Nebraska National Guard are appreciating the opportunity to share a last, and a first with each other.

With the father set to retire April 1 and the son fresh from training in February, the pair was set to travel to El Salvador to participate in a humanitarian exercise, Beyond the Horizon, in March.

“At first we thought the mission was going to end in March, my retirement date was set for April 1,” said Sgt. 1st Class Mitchell Patzel, 267th Support Maintenance Company noncommissioned officer-in-charge. “The date changed and was now happening after my retirement date; I was now going to be retired before the trip happened.”

Appreciating the short window of opportunity, Nebraska National Guard leadership took action.

“My leadership extended me 30 days to allow me to do this and I am very grateful for the opportunity,” said the senior Patzel on his final annual training drill.

The Soldiering pair was not something that happened by chance. The younger Mitchell knew at an early age that being a Soldier was something he wanted to do.

“Growing up and having my Dad bring me with him to see how everything worked in the National Guard piqued my interest, made me want to join,” said Pvt. Mitchell Patzel, Jr., 267th Support Maintenance Company mechanic.

Dad admits he left the deci-

sion to join the Nebraska Army National Guard and follow in his footsteps up to his son. Secretly, he added that he was sure that he would.

“I’ve got a picture of him behind the steering wheel of the Humvee when he was five years old,” said the senior Patzel. “He has been interested in it ever since then.”

Military service in the Patzel family was another factor.

“My paternal grandfather was in the Army, my maternal grandfather was in the Air Force, ... my uncles were in the Air Force and Marines, and my sister was in the National Guard,” the younger Patzel said. “So there is family history with the military; I wanted to keep that tradition going.”

The senior Patzel is cognizant of the perception delegating tasks among Soldiers in his unit can have.

“I have to make sure that there is no sense of favoritism between assigning him a detail,” said the noncommissioned officer-in-charge. “Everybody has to do those details; it’s just part of what we do as soldiers.”

When asked if the senior non-commissioned officer inspires the newly assigned private, the response was quick.

“I try to accomplish what he sets out for a goal that day, so he does inspire me to get work done,” said the younger Patzel.

As the sun sets on one career and rises on another, the accomplishments of one bring out the competitiveness to achieve more in the other.

“I’d like to beat him in rank and in total years of service, just to say



Photo by Tech. Sgt. Mark Wyatt

Second Generation: Sgt. 1st Class Mitchell Patzel and Pvt. Mitchell Patzel Jr. work on a Movement Tracking System in a truck in El Salvador, April 5. Mitchell Sr. is winding down his career while Mitchell Jr. is just beginning his.

I did,” Mitchell Jr. said. “But that’s a few years down the road.”

To make the trip to El Salvador a reality, some resourcefulness had to take place.

“When he (Pvt. Patzel) came back from Christmas break, he took a couple of days to do all the admin-

istrative stuff he needed to do to get on this trip,” said the senior Patzel.

The opportunity to train in a foreign country with his son is something the senior Patzel ranks atop his most significant accomplishments over the past 26 years while in uniform.

“I would say being here with my son is the highlight of my career,” said the soon-to-retire Patzel. “I’ve been to Germany six times, which was great, but this, being out here in a real-world environment with my son has made it the best opportunity I’ve ever had in my long career.”

ROC continued from page 1.

being transferred into the Nebraska Army National Guard force structure from Iowa, was designed to help provide command and control of Army organizations on a battlefield.

At the time of its stand-up, the unit consisted of just 26 Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers who had the “awesome” job of providing train command and control, security and damage control directly behind the active Army’s 3rd Corps’ leading battle area, said then-Capt. Daniel Kenkel, who served as the unit’s first operations officer.

At the time, Kadavy said the Rear Area Operations Center—now called a ROC — mission was somewhat revolutionary.

“Area support groups and rear operations centers came out of the Army force structure about the same time the Army reorganized divisions and brigade combat teams,” he said. “Each BCT basically includes a ROC, showing how useful a multidisciplinary command and control section is on the battlefield.”

“The 41st ROC was command and control in a box; it had a large number of highly proficient (non-commissioned officers, who) kept information moving to support the decision cycle, and a group of officers from many disciplines able to assess the overall impact of an event,” Kadavy added.

When it was established in Nebraska, many leaders realized the unit, which few really understood at the time, had the opportunity to make a major impact if it was ever needed. Its first commander took this opportunity to heart.

“This new unit and new mission will offer us tremendous opportunities to learn different areas and different fields,” then-Maj. Dan Hotovy said during the stand-up ceremony. “There is no way that we are not going to be successful.”

The 41st ROC’s first major opportunity to shine came in January 2001 when approximately 40 members of the unit were mobilized for duty in Macedonia as a part of the international Kosovo peacekeeping

effort known as Operation Joint Guardian. Stationed at Camp Eagle Sentry near Skopje, Macedonia, the Guardsmen served primarily as the “clearing house” for all equipment, personnel and supplies moving into and coming out of war-torn Kosovo.

The deployment was one of several Nebraska Army National Guard missions into the region following the bloody breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s. While this particular deployment was planned as a peacekeeping effort, what the Soldiers didn’t know at the time was that they would come far closer to combat than anyone had imagined.

Shortly after arriving in Macedonia for the six-month mission, local unrest caused the Macedonian government to close the border to Kosovo. This caused the members of the 41st RAOC to put in extra time ensuring that supplies, which had to be airlifted into Kosovo, arrived on time.

“The performance and teamwork demonstrated by members of the RAOC since the transition of authority has been outstanding,” said then-Lt. Col. Bryan Saucerman, unit commander at the time. “The learning curve has been steep and every day is a challenge, but we are making great headway and making a big contribution in support of Soldiers in Kosovo who are involved in Operation Joint Guardian.”

The RAOC would remain in Macedonia until July 31, 2001, when they redeployed back to Lincoln. There, the Soldiers were welcomed by a huge crowd of well-wishers at the Nebraska Army National Guard’s Army Aviation Support Facility.

Then-adjutant general Brig. Gen. Roger Lempke seemed almost prophetic as he welcomed the Soldiers home and thanked their families for their sacrifices: “Let it be a reminder to all that Nebraska National Guard Soldiers are ready and able to serve wherever in the world and whenever.”

Less than two months later ter-

rorists crashed airplanes into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and a field in rural Pennsylvania.

For the members of the 41st RAOC, the next call to duty would come 18 months after concluding the first when the unit became one of the first Nebraska Army National Guard organizations to be activated for Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On Feb. 13, 2003, then-Capt. Chris Ferdico seemed to speak for many of the unit Soldiers, more than half of whom had served in Macedonia, as they prepared for their next mission. “You know, we’ve only been back for 18 months, but I think the world is a changed place and I think what we’re doing is important and necessary. I wish it weren’t, but it is.”

A few weeks later, Ferdico and several other unit Soldiers, who were assigned to support the 101st Airborne Division during the initial invasion, would make Nebraska history again, becoming the first of what would become thousands of Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers to cross the border into Iraq as part of OIF.

In December 2011, as the U.S. pulled out of Iraq, Ferdico — now a lieutenant colonel — recalled those hectic days.

“As we waited in the relative cool of the desert night, I remember how quiet it was. I looked at awe towards the beautiful night sky—a view of the Heavens only desolation could provide,” Ferdico wrote for the *Prairie Soldier*. “I remember the near paralyzing fear that festered because of the unknown that lay ahead.”

According to Ferdico, he was among four Nebraska Soldiers assigned to move forward, “keep track of the chaos and try to figure out what the mission would be once the rest of the mission caught up.”

Ferdico said the group, which was soon joined by two other 41st RAOC vehicles, was initially stationed at a recently liberated Iraqi

Air Force air base near the city of Isknandariyah for several weeks before accompanying the rest of the division north to its final destination. It was during this brief stay that the members of the unit decided to pose for a photograph by a poster of Saddam Hussein — a photo that would soon make its way to the front page of the *Lincoln Journal Star* newspaper and onto the coverage of several national cable news networks.

Ferdico recalled the controversy the photo set off.

“In those early days of the war the “rules” weren’t yet written. Do we tell our families we are in Iraq — do we not tell our families? The truth is that everyone was handling it differently.”

“For me, it wasn’t something I was thinking about. We were a part of history and I wanted those close to me to know. I was confident it wasn’t an (operational security) issue as the whole world knew American forces were in Iraq — and the whole world was watching the Battle of Baghdad that was currently raging. The enemy knew we had kicked them out of the air base we called home and Iraqis that drove by everyday knew we were there to stay. My carefully worded e-mail merely said we were safe,” he wrote.

The unit would soon move north to Mosul where the Soldiers would settle in for their year-long stay in Iraq, taking on several new missions such as helping rebuild local Iraqi schools, overseeing convoy operations coming into Iraq from Turkey and setting up the initial training programs for Iraqi police forces. That mission would continue to evolve until the 41st RAOC returned to Lincoln in March 2004.

“It proves the necessity of the Guard over there because of some of the things we accomplished,” said then-Maj. Matthew Kelly, commander of the 41st RAOC, during the welcome home ceremony.

According to Kadavy, serving as the final 41st ROC commander was

difficult, knowing that he was responsible for closing out a unit that had made significant contributions during its time with the Nebraska Army National Guard.

“I was honored to serve in the 41st ROC,” said Kadavy. “The unit epitomizes the role of the National Guard in the Total Force.”

That role was not limited to overseas missions, either.

Kadavy said the organization also contributed significantly during training exercises as well as during state emergencies, such as the historic 2011 floods.

Kadavy said despite the difficulty of closing a unit such as the 41st ROC, he realized he had a significant opportunity to make a difference in making sure the transition was handled the right way.

“Normally, a commander works hard to train the unit and hands off the guidon to the new commander,” said Kadavy.

“In this instance, I did not pass on the unit to a single new commander, I was able to pass off highly trained Soldiers to dozens of units where they can take the skills they learned in the ROC and make their new units better.”

According to Col. Rick Dahlman, 92nd Troop Command commander, that transferral of knowledge and skills will enable the 41st ROC’s legacy to live on.

“The 41st ROC’s role in serving its fellow citizens has been exemplary,” Dahlman said during the April casing ceremony, which included a number of former commanders in the audience. “41st ROC Soldiers have been and continue to be an integral part of this nation’s defense.”

“They served admirably far away and close to home during national and state emergencies,” he added. “You and your families are all part of a continuing legacy of service and commitment to the highest and most noble of American values. ... I challenge you to take all you have learned from this great unit and make your next unit as good or better.”



Preparing For Liftoff: Members of Hastings’ Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) move quickly to a pair of U.S. Army helicopters camouflaged to look like enemy aircraft during an air assault mission at the U.S. Army Europe’s Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. The Nebraska Army National Guard Soldiers spent their Jan. 28 - Feb. 18 overseas mission helping train members of the Republic of Georgia Army for an upcoming deployment.



On The Attack: Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard’s Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), conduct a raid while training as Opposing Forces during a deployment U.S. Army Europe’s Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany.

National Guard cavalrymen use German exercise to prepare themselves, allies for future

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger
Staff Photojournalist

Members of the Nebraska Army National Guard’s 1-134th Cavalry Squadron (Reconnaissance and Surveillance) had the opportunity to experience some unique training when they traveled to Germany, Jan. 28 - Feb. 18, for a mission rehearsal exercise with Soldiers from the Republic of Georgia.

Soldiers from the Nebraska Army National Guard’s Troop A, Troop B and Detachment 1, Company C, 1-134th Cavalry traveled to U.S. Army Europe’s Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany, while troops assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Troop and Company C, 1-134th Cavalry, traveled to the 7th Army Joint Multinational Training Command in Grafenwoehr, Germany, for their overseas deployment training.

While in Germany, the Nebraska National Guard Soldiers supported 1st Battalion (Opposing Forces), 4th Infantry Regiment where they had

the chance to train in realistic joint and combined arms training conditions focusing on developing Soldiers, leaders and units for success on existing and future battlefields.

“Everyone really seemed to enjoy the training, definitely with the joint environment that we were in,” said Capt. Zachary Labrayere, 1-134th Cavalry assistant operations officer.

The mission in Germany also gave unit leaders the opportunity to provide their individual Soldiers with specific individual training they often don’t get access to in Nebraska, said Labrayere.

“Our Soldiers got to receive a lot of individual training,” said Labrayere. “They did call-for-fire, engagement skills trainer and a lot more.”

Staff Sgt. Lucas Mitchell, Troop A, 1-134th Cavalry, operations noncommissioned officer, said the deployment to Germany allow unit leaders to essentially immerse their Soldiers in training.

“When we weren’t doing our missions against the Georgia Republic we were doing training out of the

Soldiers skill level 1 book,” he said. “And we would also work on cavalry scout training.”

Mostly, however, the deployment was about helping train members of the Republic of Georgia Land Forces’ 42nd Light Infantry Battalion on how to conduct combat and counterinsurgency operations alongside foreign forces supporting North Atlantic Treaty Organization operations in Afghanistan.

“It really benefited a lot of the troops,” said Mitchell. “Especially the new Soldiers, because not a lot of units get to do the overseas training and work hand and hand with a foreign army.”

According to Mitchell the overseas deployment training was a great mission for everyone involved, especially compared to doing an annual training back in the states.

“Our Soldiers are not going to get this type of experience back home,” said Mitchell.

“The opportunity to work with both active duty and foreign army troops is an experience most Soldiers will never forget.”



Eyes On Target: A member of the Beatrice, Neb.-based Company C (Long Range Surveillance), 1-134th Cavalry (Reconnaissance and Surveillance), keeps an eye out for “enemy” activity while serving as a member of the Opposing Forces during a Jan. 28 - Feb 18 mission to Germany.

Power company adds safety measures to power lines in aviation training area

By Sgt. Heidi Krueger
Staff Photojournalist

“Safety First.”

With 110-foot tall power lines crossing a section of the Nebraska Army National Guard’s aviation training area, Norris Public Power District made sure aircrews put that motto to work.

The power lines, installed in 2011, presented a significant hazard to low flying National Guard helicopters. At the time, Norris Public Power didn’t know the new lines and wires were on a section of the Nebraska Guard’s flight training area.

“We identified it initially as a hazard,” said Lt. Col. Thaddeus Fineran, Nebraska National Guard Army Aviation Support Facility No. 1 commander, “and this may impact the safety of our flight profiles.”

The Nebraska National Guard got in contact with Norris Public Power to work together to find a solution.

Norris Public Power placed 10, 36-inch diameter spherical markers on the wires in the area Nebraska Guard helicopters cross while on the low-flying “nap-of-the-earth” training route, greatly enhancing operational safety.

During nap-of-the-earth training, pilots fly as low as terrain and vegetation will allow. The Army National Guard helicopter crews practice the training on a preapproved route during day conditions and at night using night vision goggles.

“They worked with us to identify what



Safety First: Norris Public Power placed 10, 36-inch diameter spherical markers on 110-foot tall power lines where Nebraska Army National Guard helicopters cross the wires while on a nap-of-the-earth training route.

part about those power lines were hazards and then they helped mitigate the risk,” said Fineran. “What those markers do is significantly mitigate the aviation hazard we encounter.”

“We decided to help the National Guard out and make sure they were safe,” said Jerry Enns, manager of engineering for Norris Public Power District.

“It was a cooperative effort toward safety,” said Fineran. “They were very receptive



Aviation Hazard: A Nebraska Army National Guard UH-60 Blackhawk flies safely during a nap-of-the-earth training route following Norris Public Power placing markers on power lines installed on the Nebraska Guard’s aviation training area in 2011. Norris Public Power worked in conjunction with the Nebraska National Guard to develop a solution for the dangerous power lines.

that that is a training area for the National Guard including two nap-of-the-earth training routes.”

“It’s obviously very good to be in a community where agencies partner with other agencies cooperatively,” added Fineran. “They understand safety is as much their charter as it is our charter. So it’s good to work with an organization that recognizes other users needs as much as they recognize their own.”

155th Air Refueling Wing earns 11th Outstanding Unit Award

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Assistant Editor

The Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing has been named a recipient of the 2012 Air Force Outstanding Unit Award based upon meritorious service from Sept. 1, 2010, to Aug. 31, 2012.

This marks the 11th time the Lincoln-based organization has earned the award in its 67-year history.

"The competition was extremely keen... each winner is commended for having been selected from an outstanding group of nominees," said Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt III, director of the Air National Guard

in making the announcement. "The dedication and commitment of the members of these organizations enable the Air National Guard to fulfill its commitment to the missions of peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, domestic improvement and, most important of all – defense of America."

In earning the award, the 155th Air Refueling Wing was commended for a number of accomplishments including:

- Flying more than 8,400 hours for operational training and combat, or combat support for Air Expeditionary Forces and contingency missions;

- Deploying more than 450 of 860-member unit to 18 locations

worldwide in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Odyssey Dawn, Operation United Protector and Operation Noble Eagle;

- Deploying 21 Airmen on the first-ever joint Nebraska Army and Air National Guard Afghanistan Agribusiness Development Team to help revitalize Afghan agriculture;

- Providing 59 volunteer Airmen for state active duty, patrolling 13 miles of levees that protected the city of Omaha, a vital water treatment plant and Eppley Airfield during historic Missouri River flooding;

- Awarded 2012 Airlift/Tanker Association Major General Stanley F.H. Newman Award, which recog-

nized the unit for its contributions to the accomplishment of the Air Forces mobility mission;

- Hosting 2011 "Guardians of Freedom" Airshow for more than 225,000 people as a U.S. Navy designated Tier 1 event with the Blue Angels;

- Maintaining 100 percent or greater personnel end strength for the entire period.

The 155th Air Refueling Wing was also lauded for its performance during recent Air National Guard evaluations and U.S. Air Force operational readiness exercises. Also noted were the unit's family support and energy conservation programs and its tremendous community involvement.

The unit was also recognized for its flying and ground safety efforts, having recently surpassed more than 127,000 hours of Class A/B mishap-free flying.

According to Col. Keith Schell, 155th ARW commander, the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award is a true testament to the unit's members.

"Being selected to receive this award is a direct reflection on the hard work, dedication and contributions of the members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing," said Schell. "This award recognizes the teamwork, synergy and Air Force core values that each and every one of our Airmen embodies and puts on display every single day."

Joint Force Headquarters' Air Staff receive second Organizational Excellence Award

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

The Nebraska Air National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters staff has been named the recipient of the 2012 Air Force Organizational Excellence Award by Lt. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt III, the director of the Air National Guard.

"The competition was extremely keen and each winner is commended for having been selected from an outstanding group of nominees," said Wyatt in announcing the selection of the eight Air National Guard organizations selected to receive the prestigious award.

"The dedication and commitment of the members of these organizations enable the Air National Guard to fulfill its commitment to the missions of peacekeeping, humanitarian relief, domestic improvement, and most important of

all – defense of America."

The Nebraska Air National Guard's Joint Force Headquarters staff is based in Lincoln, Neb., and serves as the Air Guard component to the joint headquarters that supports the Nebraska National Guard adjutant general and his senior staff in providing direction to Nebraska Army and Air National Guard units in response to their federal and state missions.

In the Nebraska organization's nomination packet, which spans the dates of Nov. 1, 2010, through Oct. 31, 2012, the staff was credited with a number of accomplishments including:

- Participating in numerous operational activities supporting Homeland Defense, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, to include the significant participation of Nebraska Airmen in the Afghan Agribusiness Development Team No. 2's deployment to

Afghanistan, and it's critical role in responding to the historic Missouri and Platte River flooding in 2011;

- Participating in a revitalized State Partnership Program with the Czech Republic that included 11 military-to-military exchanges in the fields of explosive ordnance disposal, air refueling and marksmanship;

- Supporting subordinate units as they earned exceptional results during numerous higher headquarters inspections;

- Significant involvement in the community at the local, national and international levels.

According to Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, the Nebraska Air National Guard headquarters staff is well deserving of this year's AFOEA, it's second in four years.

"The Airmen of Joint Force Headquarters-Nebraska have performed magnificently in their peacetime



Photo by Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen

Proud Organization: Gov. Dave Heineman places a streamer onto the guidon of the Nebraska Air National Guard Headquarters in recognition of its second Organizational Excellence Award, as Nebraska Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons (center) and Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac watch during Heineman's press conference at the Joint Force Headquarters, March 11.

and wartime activities. Joint Force Headquarters-Nebraska continues to perform at high levels and is most

deserving of recognition by award of the Air Force Organizational Excellence Award."

AWARD ANNOUNCEMENTS continued from page 1.

For the JFHQ, the streamer represented its second U.S. Air Force Organizational Excellence Award. For the 155th ARW, the streamer signified its 11th Outstanding Unit Award.

According to Heineman, both awards are especially significant accomplishments.

"The United States Air Force Organizational Excellence Award and the United States Air Force Outstanding Unit Award are two extremely competitive awards. To be selected to receive them means that these two organizations, and the Airmen who are assigned to them, have been acknowledged by the Air Force as among the best of the best."

"These awards really exemplify the value that these National Guardsmen bring to our organization," Heineman said, "and I could not be prouder of what they are doing."

Following the two unit announcements, Heineman also recognized several groups of Airmen and Soldiers for their national accomplishments. Honored were:

- The Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Medical Group Dental Clinic, which was named the best in the entire Air National Guard. Members of the clinic staff are Lt. Col. Raymond Shaddy, Omaha, Lt. Col. Michael Burbach, Lincoln, Maj. Jennifer Hasslen, Omaha, Staff Sgt. Patrick Lillis, Bellevue, and Senior Airman Lori Watts, Doniphan.

- Tech. Sgt. Shaun Tebo, Bellevue, of the 155th Medical Group, who was named the Air National Guard Outstanding Base Bioenvironmental Engineer Noncommissioned Officer of the Year.

- The Nebraska National Guard's Prairie Soldier Newspaper, which was named the top tabloid-sized newspaper of the year in the entire Army National Guard for the fourth straight year.

- Sgt. Heidi Krueger, Odell, of the



Photo by Master Sgt. Shannon Nielsen

Bright Smiles: Gov. Dave Heineman poses with members of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Medical Group Dental Clinic, which was named the best in the entire Air National Guard, during Heineman's press conference at Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, Neb., March 11. (Pictured from left) Heineman, Lt. Col. Raymond Shaddy, Lt. Col. Michael Burbach, Maj. Jennifer Hasslen, Staff Sgt. Patrick Lillis, Senior Airman Lori Watts, and Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general.

Nebraska Army National Guard 111th Public Affairs Detachment, who was named the Army National Guard's Print Journalist of the Year. Krueger also won the Army National Guard's Photojournalism Competition.

- Staff Sgt. Koan Nissen, Lincoln, of Joint Force Headquarters, who placed second in the Army National Guard Personality Feature Article Competition.

- Sgt. Jason Drager, Lincoln, of the 111th Public Affairs Detachment, who placed third in the entire Army National Guard in the News Article Competition.

- Senior Airman Mary Thach, Lincoln, of the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing, who placed second in the Air National Guard Sports Article Competition and third in the News Article Competition.

- And Maj. Kevin Hynes, Murdock, Joint Force Headquarters, who placed second in the Air National Guard Sports Photography Competition and third in the Feature Photography Competition.

"As the Governor of Nebraska and as commander-in-chief of the Nebraska National Guard, I am proud of the work that these men and women do on a daily basis," said Heineman. "These awards are a testament to what we've already known for a long time – that Nebraska National Guard Airmen and Soldiers are among the best in this nation."

The awards are also a continuing sign of the high quality work that Nebraska National Guardsmen have long been known for, said Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, adjutant general.

"The Nebraska National Guard prides itself in being an organization that challenges its members to be the best that they can be," Lyons said. "We take every opportunity to compete and represent Nebraska at the highest levels."

"It is an honor when the Departments of the Army and Air Force validate what we've known for a long time, that our Nebraska Soldiers and Airmen are among the best in the entire nation at what they do."

Nebraska Air Guard dental unit, Airman recognized nationally for superior work

By Maj. Kevin Hynes

Editor

The Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Medical Group recently earned two major national awards.

The 155th Med. Group's dental staff have been named the recipient of the Air National Guard's Small Group Dental Clinic of the Year, while Tech. Sgt. Shaun Tebo has been named the Air National Guard's Outstanding Base Bioenvironmental Engineer Noncommissioned Officer of the Year.

According to Col. Tami Thompson, commander of the Lincoln-based 155th Med. Group, which is primarily responsible for providing medical support for Nebraska Air National Guard members assigned to either Lincoln or Offutt Air Force Base, the dental clinic was selected based upon a number of achievements from Oct. 1, 2011, until Sept. 30, 2012.

These accomplishments included:

- Achieving an outstanding rating on 100 percent of dental inspectable items during a recent Health Services Inspection;

- Launching a new tracking procedure that enabled the unit to cut the number of Nebraska Air National Guard members with overdue dental records to a record low of .58 percent;

- Surpassing the unit goal of minimizing deployment medi-

cal discrepancies, which allowed them to process 263 members of the Nebraska Air National Guard scheduled to deploy with zero errors;

- Recording a customer satisfaction rate of 97 percent, with comments received used to quickly identify and solve areas of needs.

The members of the 155th Medical Group Dental Clinic are Lt. Col. Raymond S. Shaddy, Lt. Col. Michael W. Burbach, Maj. Jennifer Hasslen, Staff Sgt. Patrick Michael Lillis and Senior Airman Lori N. Watts.

In winning the other award, Tebo was credited as an innovative thinker and extraordinarily responsible Airman. Thompson said Tebo's accomplishments included:

- Managing and maintaining \$700,000 of equipment through accurate inventories that led to zero recorded discrepancies;

- Serving as a bioenvironmental engineer responder during a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear exercise with Offutt Air Force Base;

- Recording outstanding results during the 155th Med. Group's recent Health Service Inspection.

Tebo was also recognized for his work outside of his office, in particular as a contributor to the Omaha Marathon, where he helped support a first aid station, as well as his volunteer work with the Offutt Air Force Base's Child Development Center, where he assisted with trips to the zoo, a museum and a local pumpkin patch.



Tebo

Policy on transferring Post 9/11 GI Bill benefit transfers to family members effective in August

WASHINGTON (ARNEWS) — Beginning Aug. 1, every Soldier who elects to transfer their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to a family member will incur an additional four years in the Army, without regard to their time in service.

“This policy was drafted in 2009 and takes effect Aug. 1, 2013. It is important that we inform Soldiers of this existing policy regarding the Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits,” said Lt. Col. Mark Viney, chief of the Enlisted Professional Development Branch, Army G-1. That news comes in a message to military personnel, dated April 15.

The rule largely affects senior officers and enlisted Soldiers who are retirement-eligible. As of now, these Soldiers may be able to transfer benefits to their loved ones with anywhere from zero to three years of additional service. For Soldiers who are not retirement eligible, electing to transfer their GI Bill benefits to a family member means re-upping for an additional four years.

Come Aug. 1, that rule will apply to all Soldiers, whether they are retirement-eligible or not.

“The Post-9/11 GI Bill. Soldiers are entitled to the benefit for their own use, but to transfer to dependents: that is used as a recruiting and retention tool,” said Viney.

Viney also serves as the policy proponent for the Army’s Post-9/11 GI Bill Transfer of Education Benefits Program. “We want Soldiers to be informed of the impact of this policy,” Viney said. “This is going to impact their decisions and their families, and whether or not they are going to have this money available to fund their dependent’s education.”

Veterans Affairs, or VA, also has eligibility requirements for trans-

New program allows service members to translate military training into college transcripts

By Robyn Huskey
Education Services specialist

Heard about the “New” Joint Services Transcript? Know about how to convert military training to civilian college credit hours?

The JST will produce a uniform transcript of all military training and experiences for service members of the Army, Marine Corps, and Navy. This new electronic transcript service includes Army officer and warrant officer training, joint military training conducted by other services and DANTES-funded Test Scores.

More than 2,300 colleges and universities recognize these transcripts as official documentation of military training and experiences, and applicable

American Council of Education credit recommendations. Colleges determine what hours they will accept toward degree programs.

To create an account and obtain an unofficial JST, go to <https://jst.doded.mil>. Personal data should be reviewed for accuracy and ensure that completed training is documented in the Army Training Requirements and Resources System.

The site provides a short application process to have an official JST sent to a school of choice and should be completed by every Soldier attending college.

The JST will save Soldiers, and the Army, time and money.

For more information on the JST or any Army Education program, contact the Nebraska Army National Guard Education office at (402) 309-8153 or 8150.

ferability.

A Soldier must have six years of active duty in order to transfer his or her GI Bill benefits. In some cases, if a Soldier has incurred additional time in service in order to transfer GI Bill benefits to a family member, and is afterward unable to serve that additional time in service, he or she may be required to pay back those benefits.

Viney said that as the Army draws down, some Soldiers will

be involuntarily separated under force-shaping initiatives. Soldiers who are separated early under such circumstances and who had previously transferred their Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits to their dependents may retain the transferred benefits without needing to repay them to the VA. Soldiers with questions about transferring their Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits to their dependents should contact their approving official.



Photo by Master Sgt. Vern Moore

Wing family day

Members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing celebrated Family Day, April 6, at the Nebraska National Guard air base’s fuels hangar. The purpose of Family Day was to provide service members and their families with an opportunity to enjoy refreshments, company, helpful information, entertainment and receive recognition for the sacrifice made by military families – a sacrifice that often goes unnoticed.

Looking For Work: A veteran speaks with one of more than 50 prospective employers that attended the April 12, Hiring Our Heroes job fair at the Lancaster Events Center in Lincoln, Neb. The fair is part of an ongoing effort to connect current military service members, veterans and their spouses with prospective employers.

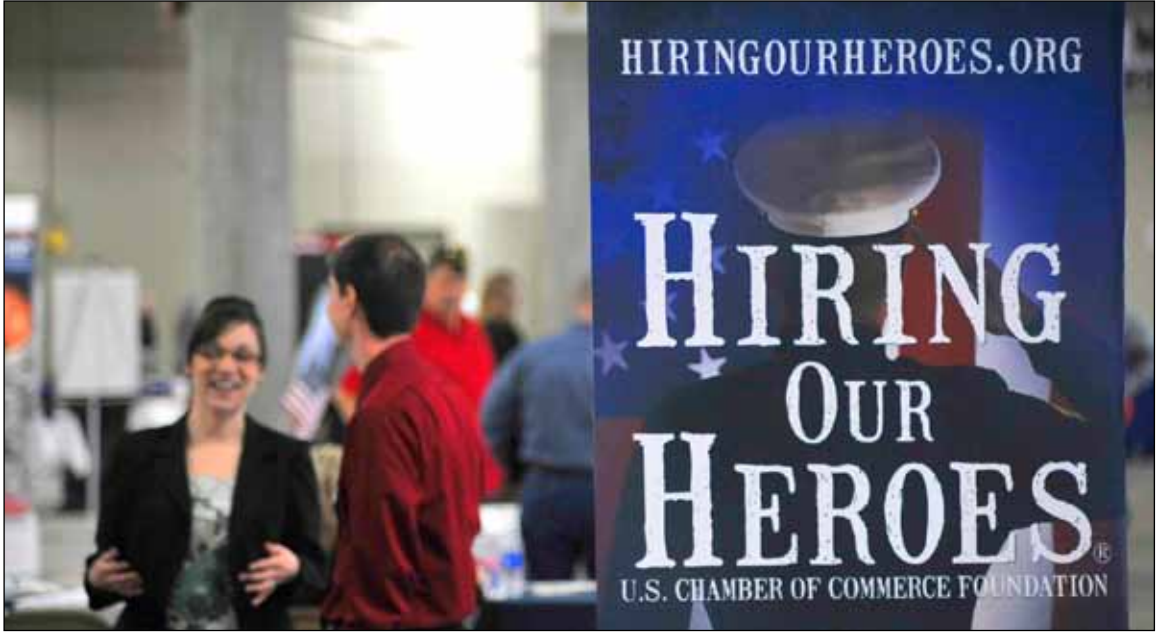


Photo by Maj. Kevin Hynes

Effort to help service members, spouses find meaningful employment continues

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons joined Gov. Dave Heineman and Cathy Lang, director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development and commissioner of the Nebraska Department of Labor, to announce two Hiring Our Heroes job fairs in Lincoln and Grand Island.

The Hiring Our Heroes initiative is the cooperative effort between the United States Chamber of Commerce, the Nebraska Department of Labor and the Nebraska National Guard. This initiative helps veterans and military spouses find meaningful employment in Nebraska.

“We are proud to be a part of this initiative to help veterans and military spouses find meaningful employment here in Nebraska,” said Heineman. “There are approximately 4,700 Army and Air National Guardsmen and women in Nebraska and thousands more Nebraskans serve in the U.S. Reserves and active military. The enthusiasm surrounding Hiring Our Heroes shows that the courage and sacrifice demonstrated by these men and women has not gone unnoticed.”

The Hiring Our Heroes job fair in Lincoln and Grand Island are designed to help both current members of the military, veterans and their spouses find meaningful employment based upon the skills they learned in the military or when their service member has been deployed.

The Lincoln event was held on April 2 while the Grand Island

event will be on Wednesday, May 1. More than a dozen sponsors, including military groups and media partners, are working to ensure the success of these events.

The Lincoln event was held at the Lancaster Event Center, with more than 50 employers registered for the fair, representing a wide array of job opportunities.

The Grand Island event will be held at the Heartland Event Center from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. As of late March, more than 60 employers had registered for the fair.

“Nebraska’s employers, along with countless organizations, continue to stand behind our veterans,” said Lang.

“I would like to thank Gov. Heineman, the Nebraska Department of Labor, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and everyone else involved for their continued interest in this important effort to connect our service members and their families with employers,” said Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general. “Our Nebraska National Guardsmen and women possess important skills like leadership, problem-solving, an ability to work under pressure and time management. Employers desire and value these skills.”

“The same could be said for Nebraska’s military spouses who have taken on numerous additional responsibilities and hone their skills while their loved ones were deployed. They, too, bring tremendous qualities that today’s employers need.”

Since the first event held in Lincoln last April, there have been seven Hiring Our Heroes events throughout the state. These job fairs have been held in Lincoln, Omaha, Norfolk, Alliance, Holdrege, Papillion and Beatrice. These events have served around 1,000 veterans and 300 employers.



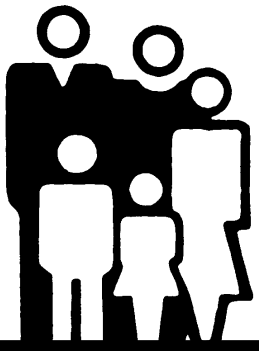
Beginners motorcycle rider courses available

If you are a current member of the Nebraska National Guard, you are eligible for reimbursement if you attend The Motorcycle Safety Foundation approved Basic Rider’s Course. Completion of the Basic Rider’s Course is required to operate a motorcycle on military installations.

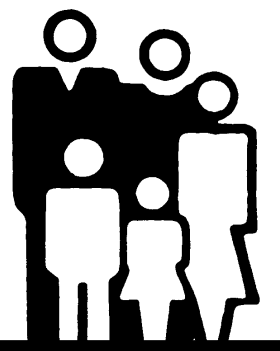
The two- to three-day course (depending upon provider) includes classroom instruction and practical riding experience in a controlled setting. It is designed for beginners and re-entry riders above the age of 19. Once completed, the training allows riders to waive the Nebraska State motorcycle test for an operator’s license and may also qualify the participant for lower insurance premiums.

Note: In order to be eligible for reimbursement, members must obtain pre-approval from the Safety Office prior to registering for this course.

For additional information, or to get pre-approval, contact the Nebraska Army National Guard Safety Office at (402) 309-1854 or the Nebraska Air National Guard Safety Office at (402) 309-1118.



Guard Family NEWS You Can Use



Official says April good time to spotlight money tips for kids

WASHINGTON (AFPS) – April is both the Month of the Military Child and Financial Literacy Month, so it's a good time to shine a spotlight on teaching children financial responsibility, said Barbara Thompson, the Pentagon's director of the office of family policy/children and youth in a joint interview with American Forces Press Service and the Pentagon Channel.

"These are life skills that you don't want to learn when you're in trouble as an adult," Thompson said.

"We think financial readiness is one of those life skills that, the sooner you start, the more prepared you are as you enter adulthood," she added.

Children as young as 3-years-old can start learning about the value of money, the importance of saving for something special and how to differentiate between wants and needs, she said.

"When you start to get those perceptions at an early age, it's easier as they grow up to make those decisions, to make wise financial decisions," Thompson added.

She said statistics on retirement preparation are startling, noting, "People have not been saving at all."

According to the results of a 2012 survey by the Consumer Federation of America, just 49 percent of working Americans have sufficient retirement savings to provide for a "desirable standard of living." Just over a third of low- and moderate-income households had savings or money market accounts.

"Right now, it's a tough time," Thompson said. "We're facing some financial uncertainty, and so it's hard to save. But you have to start small and make it a regular habit."

Some child development centers, youth programs and schools are using activities to teach children about financial readiness.

"For example, in our dramatic play areas in our child development centers, sometimes they set up a grocery store, and children learn about money and that you have to have money to buy products," Thompson said. "What's important is that they start to see that money just doesn't shoot out of the ATM machine, that you have to earn it, put it in the bank and then use it to pay for what you think is of value."

Thompson said learning to save is the foundation of financial responsibility.

"You save for a rainy day. You have an emergency fund (and) you save for something that you want. You don't go into great debt just because you want it right now; you start to save for it, and you do your research before you buy something. I think those are really important concepts," she said.

"We want to make sure that (children) have good skills for their futures," Thompson said, "whether it is recognizing their sacrifice or providing them the tools to be strong adults."

Thompson said a variety of resources are available for educators, parents and children to learn about financial responsibility. Resources include:

- Military OneSource, which offers free

Celebrating Military Kids



Photo by 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon

Unsung Heroes: Gov. Dave Heineman signed a proclamation in the Warner Chamber at the Nebraska Capital building in Lincoln, Neb., April 10, formally recognizing April as the Month of the Military Child. Throughout April, children of military members were treated to events like a free golf clinic at the Wilderness Ridge golf course in Lincoln and tours of the University of Nebraska's Memorial Stadium. The purpose of the events is to say thank-you for the sacrifices children of service members make, which often go unnoticed.

face-to-face or telephonic financial counseling, savings and investment information and educational resources for young people;

- Personal financial managers at installation family centers are certified financial counselors that can help families develop their budgets, set their financial goals and can provide classes for military children at youth centers, child development centers or schools;

- SaveandInvest.org can help adults learn financial management skills that they can

teach to their children;

- Jump\$art provides good resources for educators and bankers;

- Financial institutions that operate on military installations are required to offer financial management resources;

- Money as You Grow provides information for children ages 3 and up to help them make smart financial decisions;

- Military Youth on the Move includes financial tools for younger children, tweens and teens.

This month's focus: Defense Finance and Accounting Service

Greetings. It's finally spring in Nebraska (we hope) and looks like some of our retired friends are returning from the warmer climes and beginning to enjoy the nice weather.

As you know, Lincoln hosted the spring social on April 27 at Yankee Hill Country Club in Lincoln, and State Senator Bob Krist was our guest speaker. There are a number of issues in front of the legislature that directly and indirectly affect retired benefits, so it's timely that we heard what's happening behind the scenes.

We also hosted a retiree briefing in Kearney April 3, and there were a number of central Nebraska area retirees present to hear an update on legislative issues, Tri-Care changes, Space-A, and other important issues for retirees.

This month, we are focusing on information from DFAS to keep you updated on changes or how to make changes when your address changes:

■ Need help? Try these online tools

Here at DFAS, our primary goal is to deliver first-class service and products to each and every customer.

Take a look at the tools you can use to learn about your account and how to manage it: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/needhelp.html>

For Retirees

Here are some tools you can use before you pick up the phone. Save yourself time and stress by trying one of these options first: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/toolsyou.html>

For Retirees' Loved Ones

Teaching your beneficiaries how to apply for their benefits now, will save them time and stress later. Our website features several tools you should share with your loved ones. <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/toolslovedones.html>

Nebraska National Guard Retiree News & Notes

By retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 William Nelson

• Life changes and retired pay account

Have you recently gotten married? Did you open a new bank account? Do you need to change your allotment amounts? We need to know. Click here to find out when you need to contact DFAS: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/manage/changeofaddress/whentoupdateyouraccount.html>

• Direct Deposit required

The deadline to sign up for direct deposit expired March 1, but you still have time to take action. Find out how to sign up here: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/directdeposit.html>

• Resetting forgotten MyPay passwords gets easier

If you haven't used myPay since Dec. 13, you'll notice something different the next time you log in to your account. We've added an online password reset option. Click here for details on resetting your password: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/resetpassword.html>

• Tips to use when making a bank account change

Follow these steps to avoid missing or incorrect payments: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/news/bank-changes.html>

• Customer service menu options change

Our telephone menu options have recently changed. If you need help with your military retired or annuity pay, please choose option 1 after dialing either 800-321-1080 or

888-332-7411. For help with myPay, press 5.

• Questions, answers about sequestration

Click here for questions and answers regarding sequestration: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/sequestration.html>

• Change to Survivor Benefit Plan annuity accounts

Beginning in August, we will no longer be able to establish Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity accounts or make SBP payments to annuitants without a valid Social Security Number or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN): <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/changetosbp.html>

• Download entire newsletter

Click the "PDF version" link at the bottom of the page linked below to download load a printer-friendly version of this newsletter: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter.html>

■ From Sgt. 1st Class Austin Behnk:

My phone number is (402) 309-8151 and email address is austin.j.behnk@mail.mil. Staff Sgt. Mandy Hatcher's phone number is (402) 309-8164 and mandy.r.hatcher@mail.mil.

We are located in the new Joint Force Headquarters at the Nebraska National Guard air base, 2433 NW 24th St, Lincoln, NE 68524.

If you have a change of address, please contact us to update our records to make sure

you receive any information we mail out.

If in receipt of or entitled to retired pay: Defense Finance and Accounting Service U.S. Military Retired Pay

PO Box 7130

London, KY 40742-7130

Phone: (800) 321-1080 or

(216) 522-5955; FAX: (800) 469-6559

(put SSN on all pages)

If in receipt of or entitled to SBP/RS-FPP annuity:

Defense Finance and Accounting Service U.S. Military Annuitant Pay

PO Box 7131

London, KY 40742-7131

Phone: (800) 321-1080 or

(216) 522-5955; FAX: (800) 982-8459

(put SSN on all pages)

If a Retired Reservist not yet age 60:

U.S. Army Human Resources Command Attn: AHRC-PDP-TR

1600 Spearhead Division Avenue

Dept. 482

Ft. Knox, KY 40122-5402

(800) 318-5298 or (502) 613-8950

Helpful list of numbers: DEERS/ID card stations within Nebraska.

- G1 – 2433 N.W. 24th Street, Lincoln, NE 68524 – 402-309-8167

- Spirit of 76 Armory 67th BFSB – 402-309-7058 or 402-309-7260

- 92nd Troop Command Penterman Armory at NEANG Air Base 402-309-1749 or 402-309-1739

- Air Guard (Lincoln Air Base) Bldg 600 Room E209 402-309-1452

- Offutt AFB 402-294-5019

- Kearney Armory 5710 Airport Road Kearney 402-309-7743 or 402-309-7758

- Norfolk Armory 817 S 1st St Norfolk 402-309-8908 or 402-309-8900

The number for DEERS is 1-800-538-9552.

Enjoy your well-deserved retirement!

PROMOTIONS

Army National Guard
Major

Eric P. Baptiste
James R. Hewitt
Chrls D. McWilliams

Captain

Justin R. Vonloh

Master Sergeant

Dale T. Alexander Jr.
Noel A. Ford
James L. Gross

Sergeant First Class

Jason W. Delancey
James G. Dinville
Laura H. Hardesty
Christopher P. Herndon
Lacey J. Kollath
Ronnie J. Larmeu
Robert M. Peterson
Cesar A. Rivas
Jarrod J. Schmoker

Staff Sergeant

Bryan P. Carroll
Wyatt A. Feilmeier
Jillian L. Kinzer
Donald L. Klute
Justin K. Knapp
Andrew P. Liss
Shawn N. Schomer
Jason R. Sindelar
Troy D. Vanheufeln
William D. Webster
Daniel C. Wilkins
Zachary L. Wright
Laura G. Yeramysheva
Ryan A. Zulkoski

Sergeant

Brittany N. Alcalá
William E. Beave
Michelle L. Berry
Michael J. Block
Caleb M. Brown
Brian J. Bruce
Sean M. Carlson
Mary v. Crandell
Beth D. Donica
Keton C. Ewing
Jonathan D. Gotschall
Adam T. Hazen

Michael W. Iverson
Ryan D. John
Carsen J. Kuehl
Zachary A. Long
Amanda C. Loomis
Dylan B. McSwain
Justen C. Meneses
Ashley M. Nanfito
Anthony W. Noyes
Katie M. O'Brien
Ramon E. Orellanamajano
Ricky T. Parker
Jessica F. Phillips
Andrea E. Pieper
Shane L. Ruh
Timothy G. Sanderson
Garrett D. Schukei
Misty D. Shane
Colton J. Stepp
Leslie L. Suhr
Matthew R. Vetick

Specialist

Jenna R. Arnett
Justin M. Beinlich
Katrina M. Brock
Ethan G. Burnside
John W. Cardone
Christopher W. Christiansen
Jefferson G. Davis
Mckenna L. Eshleman
Kameron L. Foss
Rachel J. Fowler
Miles R. L. Garrard
Joline E. Georgiana
Christian Gonzalez
Matthew L. Graves
Matthew E. Hall
Jacob E. Hill
Mitchell B. Hunt
Yoni B. Izaguirre
Aaron J. Johnson
Brett J. Johnson
Kaytlyn N. Johnson
Arez M. Karim
Samantha J. Kraft
Kody J. Krantz
Coleman J. Loneragan
Nolan W. McCulley
Brandon T. McMullen
Joshua E. Nelson
Ashton J. Ohde
Nolan R. Pittman
Jeremy K. Paulson

Leslie V. Roman
Brianna N. Ross
Abdoul G. Songne
Jonathan R. Steager
Kristopher J. Swanson
Jesus Trevino
Julia L. Webster
Zachary A. Wichersham

Private First Class

Eric D. Bartels
Keith A. Copeland
Taylor K. Duffy
Justin T. Dutcher
Haden Jensen
Kalin E. Koch
Ryan E. Lawrence
Brandon L. Niemoth
Brandon M. Olsen
Gabriel E. Penaherrera

Edgar J. Salazar
Rakia A. Singleton
Lindsey B. Smith

Private Two

David W. Fuhs
Mark L. Jacobs
Justin S. Pritchard

Air National Guard
Major

Jason B. Erb
Jennifer J. Leavitt
Matthew E. Siemen

First Lieutenant

Jonathan K. Berggren
Sean M. Cappel
Mahleene M. Wright

Second Lieutenant

Kevin M. Lindsey
Brian L. Obermeier

Senior Master Sergeant

Angel K. Freeman
Jason L. Schroeder
Jeffrey S. VanNortwick

Master Sergeant

Connie E. Cooper
David A. Deke
Donald L. Dissmeyer
Craig A. Hilderbrand
Charles R. Sams

Technical Sergeant

Richard N. Anderson
Amber D. Bogle
Jered K. Glover

Trent M. Puhalla
Blue D. Swetland
Aaron L. Wescott

Staff Sergeant

Taylor T. Ashmore
Eva Dean
Kasey C. Linden

Senior Airman

Nathan Camp
Andrew M. Hoefler
Donn V. Marcussen
Levi J. Sullivan
Cody Welsh

Airman

Daniel W. Burbach Jr.
Ethan Haberman
Katherine T. Welsh

AWARDS

Army National Guard

Bronze Star Medal
Capt. Gary P. Hansen

Legion of Merit

Col. Michael L. Deger

Meritorious Service Medal

Lt. Col. Robert J. Kadavy
Lt. Col. Georgia K. Kroese
Maj. Kenneth J. Boatman
Maj. James S. Oliver
Master Sgt. Noel A. Ford
Master Sgt. Barry L. Read
Sgt. 1st Class Matthew L. Starkey
Staff Sgt. Nicholas A. Kemp
Staff Sgt. Carl A. Swotek

Army Commendation Medal

Lt. Col. Gary A. Ropers
Capt. Zachary V. Labrayere
Capt. Jeremiah J. Szynskie
2nd Lt. Dustin J. McKenna
Staff Sgt. Lynda L. James
Staff Sgt. Rachell M. Rowley
Staff Sgt. Walter R. Shumate
Sgt. William E. Byrd
Spc. Benjamin A. Heimes
Spc. Jonathan A. Johnson

Spc. Michael J. Mohr
Spc. Matthew J. Pawley
Spc. William C. Stollberg

Army Achievement Medal

2nd Lt. Derek D. Zulkoski
Chief Warrant Officer 2 Britt A. Moser
Staff Sgt. Steven J. Cerny
Staff Sgt. Matthew J. Franklin
Staff Sgt. Thomas L. Friesell
Staff Sgt. Lucas L. Geyer
Staff Sgt. Bret A. Liermann
Sgt. James A. Adelman
Sgt. Joshua A. Arocho
Sgt. William E. Byrd
Sgt. Alberto Camarillo
Sgt. Sean M. Carlson
Sgt. Nathan A. Dooley
Sgt. Nathan R. Neuirth
Spc. Raymond M. Evans
Spc. David A. Halstead
Spc. Benjamin A. Heimes
Spc. Jacob E. Hill
Spc. Jonathan A. Johnson
Spc. Adam C. Miller
Spc. Eric R. Moseman
Spc. Travis P. Schenck
Spc. Dain D. Sudik

Military Outstanding
Volunteer Service Medal

Spc. Patrick P. Farrens Jr.
Spc. Michael B. Warrick

Combat Infantry Badge

Spc. Benjamin A. Heimes

Combat Action Badge

Spc. Jonathan A. Johnson

Nebraska National Guard

Commendation Medal
Staff Sgt. Jason J. Winer
Sgt. Luke E. Katz

Spc. Joseph C. Pace Jr.

Nebraska National Guard

Individual Achievement Medal
Sgt. Christopher T. Martin
Sgt. Jason E. Sautter
Sgt. Ethan M. Schroeder
Sgt. Alisha S. Wagner
Sgt. James A. Wieting
Sgt. Paul D. Willman
Spc. Jesse L. Beaudette
Spc. Jonathan M. Lance
Spc. William C. Stollberg
Pfc. Benjamin K. Stewart
Pvt. Kellan B. Garber

RETIREMENTS

Army National Guard

Maj. Clint R. Kinman
Cpt. Kevin A. Beavers
Chief Warrant Officer 5 Robyn R. Huskey
Chief Warrant Officer 4 Matthew C. Stewart
Sgt. 1st Class Johnny R. Eynethich
Sgt. 1st Class John D. Flint

Sgt. 1st Class Thomas W. Jones
Sgt. 1st Class Keith N. Myers
Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Pearson
Staff Sgt. Charles J. Ashcraft
Staff Sgt. Randy L. Wallerich
Spc. Louis L. Svoboda
Spc. Sherry S. Wattier

Shortakes



Photo by Sgt. Heidi Krueger

Nebraska City High School jazz band helps Military Department staff honor African American Heritage Month

The Nebraska City High School Jazz Band performs a number of songs during the Nebraska National Guard's African American Heritage Month Celebration, held Feb. 27 at the Joint Force Headquarters building at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb. The Nebraska City Jazz Band was directed by Sgt. Greg Olsen, a member of the Nebraska 43rd Army Band.

"It's nice to play for people for a great celebration of African American Heritage Month," said Hannah Dierking, a trumpet player and senior from Nebraska City.

Honors Rendered

Nebraska Air Guardsmen's accomplishments, deployers honored during Wing Family Day

By Staff Sgt. James Lieth

Staff Writer

Ninety-two Airmen from the Nebraska Air National Guard's 155th Air Refueling Wing were recognized during a Hometown Heroes Salute ceremony at the Nebraska National Guard air base, in Lincoln, Neb., April 6.

The purpose of the ceremony was to recognize members who deployed in 2012 and thank their families who were "there for the tough times, the times we have to deploy," said Col. Keith Schell, commander of the 155th ARW.

Maj. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, also personally thanked family members for the sacrifices they made while their loved ones were deployed.

The Airmen were split into three tiers, with tier one members deploying for 30-179 days, tier two members deploying for 180-365 days, and tier three members deploying for 366 consecutive days.

All members received a special Center-of-Influence Medallion intended to be presented to someone who supported them and their family during their deployment.

Tier one members also received a special letter of appreciation with a Hometown Heroes Salute coin while their spouse, or significant other, receive a rosewood pen and pencil set. Their children received Hometown Hero Salute logo-engraved dogtags.

Tier two members also received a flag framed in a rosewood box and their spouse, or significant other, received a lapel pen or bracelet, while their children received a Hometown Heroes Salute cinch sack.

The tier three members received



Photo by Staff Sgt. James Lieth

Dedication: Tech. Sgt. Paul Wood (second from left), a petroleum, oil and lubricants troop with the 155th Logistics Readiness Squadron, receives a letter of appreciation from Col. Keith Schell, commander of the 155th Air Refueling Wing, during a Hometown Heroes event at the Nebraska National Guard air base in Lincoln, Neb., April 6. Wood was recognized for deploying the previous year. Also pictured is Brig. Gen. Daryl Bohac, assistant adjutant general, Air, and Chief Master Sgt. Nancy Vondrasek, 155th ARW command chief master sergeant.

an eagle statue. Their spouse, or significant other, received a crystal bowl, while their children also received a Hometown Heroes Salute cinch sack.

During the ceremony, recent retirees, Community College of the Air Force graduates and several community volunteers were also recognized.

The 155th ARW was also presented with their 11th Air Force Outstanding Unit Award ribbon to be placed on the 155th ARW guidon.

"The Air Force Outstanding Unit Award is just a way of showing... and certifying what we already knew," said Lyons. "That you are great Airmen."

Street Talk

“What is the one National Guard benefit that you personally value the most?”



Senior Airman Patrick Williams
155th Civil Engineer Squadron
“The cost of health insurance compared to my civilian job. It’s not necessarily more affordable, but the level of coverage is more than what my civilian employer covers.”



Staff Sgt. Joshua Wessel
189th Transportation Company
“I love that it’s Nebraskans serving Nebraska.”



Pfc. Dakota Kaufman
1057th Transportation Company
“The college benefits. College is really expensive nowadays... It’s easier for that to be paid already.”



Master Sgt. Rhonda McClellen
155th Air Refueling Wing
“The greatest benefit I have received is the support and camaraderie of both past and present 155th members.”



Sgt. William Montoya
Detachment 2,
1074th Transportation Company
“The school benefits. Once (I) get done, I can further my career choices.”



Staff Sgt. John McCrory
Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 734th Transportation Battalion
“To actually be able to do the job; to be activated for state-level or federal-level emergencies, and to assist other units in training.”

Memorial Day special time to remember fallen comrades

On May 27, many of us in the Nebraska National Guard’s Command Group will be giving speeches across the state in honor and memory of the fallen on Memorial Day.

And although we in uniform tend to remember our fallen warriors more often, Memorial Day is the day set aside for all Americans to honor the sacrifice of those who never returned.

For some Americans, Memorial Day represents the “unofficial” beginning of summer and they spend the day playing a few rounds of golf or barbecuing with friends. But there will also be those who will be visiting the graves of loved ones, bringing flowers and laying wreaths in remembrance.

This simple tradition reminds us that while those lost are no longer physically present, they are always with us in spirit. And while we welcome the opportunity to spend time with friends and family, we also recognize that the true purpose of Memorial Day is to honor those who have lost their lives in service to the nation.

First and foremost, Memorial Day is a time to recognize the brave women and men of our armed forces, many of whom gave their last full measure of devotion so that future generations can live in security. By military tradition, we lower our flags in their honor and we pay tribute to those who carry on their legacy of bravery and service.

Those who serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, the Reserves and the

Another Voice

State Command Sergeant Major

Eli Valenzuela

National Guard know the sacrifice that comes with defending liberty. We know what it means to put a nation’s safety and security before our own. And for that, I salute you all.

At dozens of cemeteries around our state, honor guards, veterans and their families will gather to pay their respects to those who served our nation.

While many Americans plan to return to their hometowns for the holiday, for the past 12 years many of our military personnel have spent at least one, if not more, Memorial Days overseas. This year we can be especially grateful that so many of our Soldiers are spending this Memorial Day at home with friends and family.

Our Nebraska Army National Guard has played an active role in our nation’s armed forces since 2001. Several Nebraska Army National Guard units were activated in the months following 9/11 with continued deployments thereafter. According to the Nebraska Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 80 Warriors with Nebraska ties have been killed while serving in our nation’s armed forces. The Nebraska Army National Guard has lost 14 of our Citizen Soldiers.

Every Memorial Day has a pro-

found significance for the families of those Soldiers. Memories will be stronger, feelings of loss will be deeper and the grief will feel as if it were yesterday all over again.

We must continue to remember our Survivor Families, for they are the ones who feel the loss the

greatest.

We as a service organization also feel their loss, which is why it is important that we take time to show our veterans, military service members and their families how grateful we are for their sacrifice.

On Memorial Day all flags will fly at half staff in mourning and also in honor of the courage and bravery of those who have sacrificed for freedom.

At noon they will be raised in recognition of the enduring human spirit that lives on in each of us. Gen. George Patton once stated during a memorial service, “In my mind we came here to thank God that men like these lived rather than regret that they died.”

On this Memorial Day, I will not spend the day dwelling on the loss of Spc. Kelly, Master Sgt. Tarango-Griess, Staff Sgt. Fischer, Sgt. 1st Class Jameson, Sgt. Ford, Staff Sgt. Hansen, Sgt. Debro, Sgt. Matheny, Spc. Bailey, Sgt. Schmuecker, Spc. Heuck, Sgt. Schlote, Sgt. Jones and Staff Sgt. Hamburger.

Rather, at noon I’ll remember the lives lived by Blake, Linda, Jeremy, Trish, Josh, Jeff, DB, Randy, Bill, Jake, Ray, Bob, Omar and Patty.

I ask you all to join me in doing the same.

Olympic athlete, former World War II prisoner’s odyssey provides important lessons for today

Sometimes inspiration comes out of the blue, smacking you across the temple like a sucker punch. Other times it’s even more surprising than that.

Recently, for me inspiration came in the form of a book my wife brought home with her from work on the off-chance that I might find it interesting.

Boy, did I ever.

The book, “Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption,” was written by Lauren Hillenbrand, who is probably best known for her book “Sea Biscuit.” Published in 2010 by Random House, the book details the life of Louie Zamperini, Olympic distance runner, B-24 bombardier and prisoner of war survivor.

Don’t know who Louie Zamperini is? Don’t feel bad, I’d never heard of him either prior to picking up this book. I don’t think I will soon forget him, however.

Over the past couple years, it’s safe to say we’ve been confronted with a number of situations that have drummed up the level of stress in the National Guard. Deployment drawdowns, increasing state emergencies, moving into new facilities, dealing with uncertain federal budgets, changes in readiness training have all combined to create environments that probably have more than one of us feeling levels of tension.

This isn’t to say that stress isn’t a bad thing. In fact, stress is actually a normal human feeling that, if handled in the right way, can help focus our minds and assist us in accomplishing unexpected and amazing things.

However, unregulated stress, especially if accompanied by feelings of helplessness, hopelessness or despair, can often lead a person to make bad choices, participate in risky or self-destructive activities, or become self-consumed with anger or guilt.

My Turn

Editor, Prairie Soldier

Kevin J. Hynes

We also now know that these stressful experiences are often normal reactions to abnormal situations and circumstances, and that seeking help really is a sign of strength.

Louie Zamperini definitely serves as an example of what the power of positive thoughts can do to help us find the strength to persevere through even the most difficult situations.

Growing up in southern California as the son of two poor Italian immigrants, Zamperini seemed destined for a life of unrealized potential. Known locally as a petty crook and budding bully, Zamperini was definitely headed down the wrong road when his brother Pete noticed that he had an instinctual gift for running, particularly endurance running. Pete helped coach and encourage the younger Zamperini to develop this hidden to the point that by the time he was in high school, he emerged as a minor sports celebrity in California, recording mile times that were just slower than national and world records.

Shortly after finishing high school, Zamperini earned a spot on the American Olympic team that competed in the 1936 games in Berlin. Finishing eighth in the brutal 5,000 meter race, which was dominated by much older runners, Zamperini’s final lap of 56 seconds earned him the attention of Adolf Hitler, who asked to meet the young American, supposedly saying “Ah, you’re the boy with the fast finish.”

Two years later, Zamperini set the national record for collegiate milers at 4:12 while running for the University of Southern California, a record that would stand for the next

15 years.

Zamperini, many speculated, was a shoo-in for the 1940 Olympics scheduled for Tokyo and would most likely become the first athlete to break the supposedly unbreakable 4-minute barrier.

World War II had other plans for Zamperini, however.

Enlisting into the U.S. Army Air Forces, Zamperini was commissioned a second lieutenant and, despite a deep fear of flying, trained as a bombardier on a B-24 Liberator.

In May 1943, Zamperini’s plane went down in the Central Pacific during a search and rescue mission for another aircraft that had disappeared. He and two other crewmates survived the crash and for the next 47 days drifted for thousands of miles, fighting thirst, hunger, sharks and even surviving being strafed by a Japanese bomber.

When they reached the Marshall Islands, Zamperini and the other remaining survivor were captured by the Japanese Navy, beginning a two-and-a-half-year ordeal under the hands of their Japanese captors, one of whom was so sadistic and depraved that it stuns the imagination.

What makes this story so captivating is that through it all, Zamperini found a way to persevere and maintain a positive outlook in the face of unspeakable cruelty and inhumane conditions. It’s also a story about coming to grips with the anger and guilt that often accompanies a terrible ordeal and finding the strength and willpower to forgive.

For me, the story was an amazing journey that gave me a better understanding of the power that remaining positive and continuing to place one foot in front of the other even if all seems bleak and impossible, can have.

Like I said, it was definitely a story that I hope to never forget about an athlete who is simply unforgettable.

Grueling New Mexico marathon a family affair

■Retired Nebraska Guardsman honors family member during annual honorary desert race

By 2nd Lt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

When Max Lockhart graduated high school and was getting ready to strike out on his own, he struggled to find his way.

Lockhart and a few friends from his native Tekamah, Neb., didn't have much opportunity to find civilian jobs because the area's economy had yet to fully recover from the Great Depression. But his country needed Soldiers, so the Army was their solution.

Lockhart was quickly sent to the Philippines where he completed basic training and began his military service. Lockhart was one of more than 70,000 American and Filipino Soldiers who fought the Japanese to defend the islands of Luzon, Corregidor in malaria-infested conditions with little rations and medical help. On April 9, 1942, they had no choice but to surrender to the Japanese, who forced them to march more than 50 miles through the Philippine jungles.

Thousands died from the horrendous conditions and treatment from their Japanese captors during the march. More died in prisoner-of-war camps following what has become known as the 'Bataan Death March.'

In one of those POW camps, Lockhart's service was cut short when he died following one of the most brutal episodes in history.

Nearly seventy-one years later, Pfc. Max Lockhart finished the march again in the form of a photo pinned to the backpack of retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Steven Loftis during the 24th annual Bataan Memorial Death March at White Sands, N.M., March 17.

Loftis, a one-time Nebraska Command Chief Warrant Officer who retired in 2009, honored the memory of Lockhart by completing the 26.2-mile course in full military uniform while wearing a 35-pound ruck sack. But Lockhart isn't just one of the many random people honored during the annual competition – he's Loftis' uncle.

Loftis joined more than 5,000 other participants to take part in the memorial event, which is one of the most demanding marathons available. The annual event is a tribute to the few-remaining survivors of the original Bataan Death March, those who died during the march and subsequently in POW camps, and survivors who've passed on since.

A driving force in the creation of a Nebraska marathon team, which was used as a model for the National Guard Marathon program, Loftis has competed in more than 30 marathons in his lifetime. At 61 he decided it was finally time to try the memorial death march.

"It's one of those things that I've known about for several years, but I thought it was a really stupid thing to do," said Loftis.

He said he had always concentrated on having the fastest time possible in the marathons he'd run and the Bataan race was not the place for that. But as time passed his attitude changed and he realized this particular race wasn't about a time, it was about honoring those who had endured the horrific event, including an uncle he never had the privilege of meeting.

"My family has talked about my uncle over the years," said Loftis. "It wasn't an up-front kind of thing all the time, but it came up occasionally. His name was Max, but everyone referred to him as Sam for some reason, so he was our uncle Sam and it just became something surreal thinking about what he had gone through."

At the beginning and end of the race, participants have the chance to shake the hands of the few remaining survivors of the actual death march. Seeing them and connecting with such an amazing piece of history had a profound impact on Loftis.

"Being able to participate in something connected with the original Bataan march and memorializing the people who suffered through it – trying to get some kind of sense of the extreme physical effort that it takes to do something like that – it's just been a terrific event for me," said Loftis. "It's something I'll always look back on with a sense of tremendous pride."

Loftis was joined by Sgt. 1st Class Michael Hagen, the current National Guard Bureau marathon coordinator who works in the Joint Force Headquarters in Lincoln, Neb. Hagen participated in what's known as the civilian light category, wearing a National Guard jersey and running the event like a normal marathon.

The event is put on at the New Mexico base to commemorate the nearly 2,000 New Mexico Guardsmen who were a part of the original march. The route is miles of sandy trails with hot dusty winds pelting participants through multiple



Courtesy Photo

Photo Finishers: (From left) Angie Hodge, Sgt. 1st Class Michael Hagen, National Guard Bureau marathon coordinator, retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Steven Loftis and Capt. Kelly Leugers of the Ohio National Guard, pose for a photo after finishing the 'Bataan Memorial Death March' at White Sands, N.M., March 17. Loftis participated in the race with a photo of his uncle, Pfc. Max Lockhart, who died in a prisoner of war camp following the actual Bataan Death March in WWII, pinned to his backpack.

elevation changes and uneven terrain. With temperatures ranging from 50s in the morning to mid-80s in the afternoon, the conditions are meant to help participants understand a little of what the Soldiers went through in WWII.

"It's more mentally challenging than physically challenging, I think," said Hagen, who ran his sixth commemorative march. "You can prepare your body all you want, but looking at the hills and the conditions, it'll zap your mind."

"It's just powering through those and powering through the whole course," he added. "Just changing your mindset, no different I'm sure than the actual march. It's mind over matter. Get through one step at a time."

Loftis agreed.

"In the spirit of Bataan, trying to put your mindset into what was going on with the original Bataan – they don't want you to be comfortable, they don't want you know everything that's going on," said Loftis. "These guys suffered through a lot...you just do it because that's the spirit of Bataan. You want to put your mind into, to the degree that you can, what these guys were suffering through when they went through the original march. And we did – it was confusing."

Loftis was well prepared for the

march. He said he'd been training for six months with advice from his own nephew, who is in the Army's Special Forces. And despite his previous athletic accomplishments, finishing the Death March is at the top of his list.

"As far as physical performance, this is the greatest thing I've ever done," said Loftis. "I've run some pretty good marathons. I've done other various performances and I've been a physical person all my life, but this is one of the greatest things that I think I've ever accomplished."

Being his first event of this nature, Loftis said he would have accepted any time less than eight hours. As one of the oldest competitors, he took top honors in his age category along with the age category below him and placed 36th overall in the military heavy division with a time of 6 hours, 58 minutes and 55 seconds. But his competitive side won't allow him to be satisfied with his time.

"I feel like I performed pretty well," he said. "I think I've got a lot better performance in me, too."

"You just want to go down there and do it to honor the Bataan memory but at the same time you can't help but want to compete," he added.

Competing aside, Loftis and Hagen said meeting true survivors

from original death march had them a little star-struck and would recommend the experience to everyone.

"I've met some people in my life that you think are pretty top-notch, high-quality people that would intimidate," said Loftis. "But these guys win out, hands down. They're the most impressive people I've ever met in my life just because of what they've survived in their life."

"It's almost that everyone in the military should do it just to shake the hands of one of the survivors," said Hagen. "To hear them talk and tell you their story of how things were and how they got through things and how they endured even after they finished the march. How they endured the prison camps and everything is a mind-blowing story and all of the sudden your day is not as bad as you thought it was."

"Anybody who has any sense of where they've come from in their existence really should take this on," said Loftis. "At least go see what it's like."

Loftis has already decided he'll be back for next year's race, but felt very differently as he crossed the finish line.

"I felt like crap," he said. "I could not think of anything other than 'I am so glad I am done with this thing.' And then it took a while for the real feelings to come around."

"I'm in for next year," he added.

"If you would have asked me that 10 minutes after I finished...it took about a half hour for me to recover and decide that I've got to do that again."

And through the pain and difficulty of the march, Loftis was always carrying his uncle on his backpack, but he doesn't necessarily see it that way.

"He carried me through some pieces of that too," said Loftis. "There were some times there in that last 6 miles it gets pretty rough. You can see the finish essentially from the 20-mile mark – you can see White Sands right there – and you know all you have to do is get there. And down the road they turn you back up into the desert and they've got you wandering around all these hills and things in the desert. You have no idea where you're going."

"It gets mentally really, really tough, so having Max there with me did give me the inspiration to get my head back up, focus, get back on pace and go through that. It was a real struggle to keep focus in that last six, especially that last four," he added. "Having him with me really was a significant difference I think. So when we go back for the next one next year, he's going to be with me again."

"We're a pretty good team."

Military Child Month tees off with annual golf clinic

By Staff Sgt. James Lieth
Staff Writer

Month of the Military Child kicked off when approximately 40 children of all ages gathered for a free golf clinic at Wilderness Ridge Golf Club in Lincoln, Neb., April 6. There, they were taught the fundamentals of putting, chipping, and the full golf swing from Wilderness Ridge staff, Nebraska PGA members and University of Nebraska, Lincoln Professional Golf Management students.

"This is an event where we bring all of the military kids together who have a family member or family members that are deployed or serving in the military," said Chris Thomson, PGA director of golf operations at Wilderness Ridge. "They are essentially serving as well and it's a program that we found out (about) a couple years ago... that April was the month of the military child."

Service members often spend long periods away from their families and close friends. This time apart has potential to put stress on many relationships.

"By providing a program such as the youth program, we're showing steps on how to help children deal with their emotions during these times as well as providing activities that are fun, so they can see that they're not the only ones..." said Sgt. Faiymeen Mumtaz, a state family program specialist.

The parents also enjoy spending time with their children while they learn a new skill.

"My kids are having a ball out here. They enjoy getting together with other service members' children," said Staff Sgt. Gary Jacobsen, a Warrior Leader Course instructor with the 1-209th Regional Training Institute at Camp Ashland, Neb. "Personally I think it's a great opportunity for my kids coming out and (they) are kind of interested in golf. It's a chance to come out and learn from people who actually know how to golf."

Thomson said this was the fourth -straight year Wilderness Ridge has hosted the golf event.

"It's just a way we can say, thanks."



Photos by Staff Sgt. James Lieth

(Above) In The Jar: Alex Bjorkman sinks a putt during the fourth annual Month of the Military Child golf clinic at Wilderness Ridge in Lincoln, Neb., March 6.

(Left) Professional Instruction: Maureen Farrell, Head Golf Professional for Wilderness Ridge gives some pointers to Davis Moody during the fourth annual Month of the Military Child golf clinic at Wilderness Ridge in Lincoln, Neb., March 6.